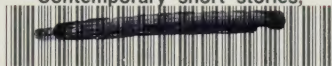


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# CONTEMPORARY SHORT STORIES

SELECTED BY

KENNETH ALLAN ROBINSON

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH IN DARTMOUTH COLLEGE



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

BOSTON • NEW YORK • CHICAGO • DALLAS

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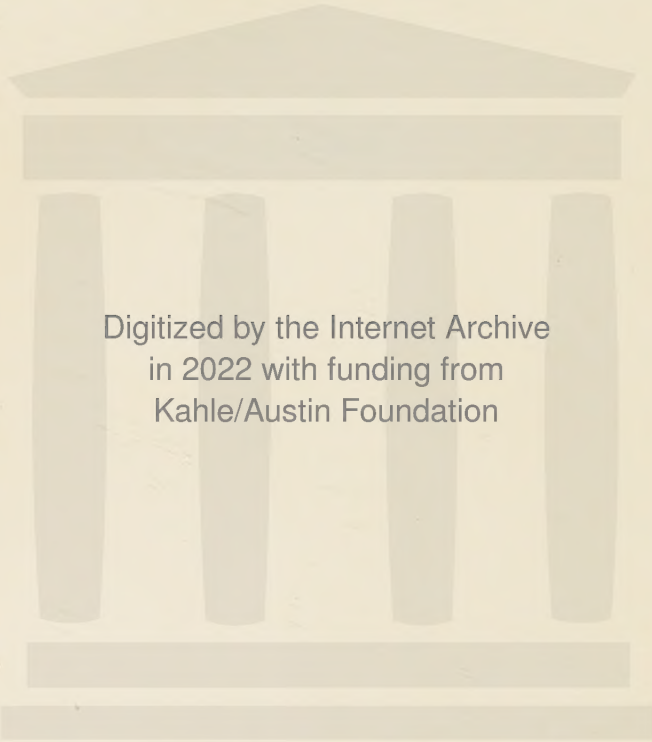
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## PREFACE

THIS book presents a collection of representative short stories by living writers, English and American, who are active creative forces in the field of fiction to-day, and whose work gives promise of having more than transitory value. It is not intended to be a year-book of the short story. The word "contemporary" has been interpreted in a fairly wide sense; the stories included, in one or two cases, extend back as far as the beginning of the century, but in every case the authors represented are authors who have produced a considerable body of good work and in every case except two they are authors who are still actively productive. The two authors referred to — Miss Katherine Mansfield and Joseph Conrad — have died since the collection was begun. Mr. Thomas Hardy and Mr. Rudyard Kipling are not represented. They belong to a somewhat older generation than the average of writers represented in the book and for some time there has been little reason to look for important fresh work from their pens. Both men have had, however, definite influence on the contemporary generation.

It will be found difficult, it is hoped, to pigeon-hole or to classify the stories in the present volume according to the formulas of some teachers of the short story. To label stories according to a half-digested terminology, to say that such and such a story is a "story of rising action" while another story is a "story of dominant theme" is to impose a limitation on the reader's understanding of the story that at best is futile and at worst — if taken too seriously, that is — is positively disastrous. Too often this glib cataloguing covers a failure to perceive the spiritual values that lie within the work. Liter-

ature goes dead under such handling. Furthermore the plots of many of the stories cannot be diagrammed (at least I have been unable to diagram them). About many of the stories there is nothing more algebraic than there is about life itself.

If any unifying demand has been made of the stories chosen for this collection beyond the demand that may be made of art generally — that it excite, that it satisfy — it is a demand that the business of fiction be recognized as the portrayal of man's developing consciousness of himself among his contacts with life, and not the superficial gestures he makes trying to realize his superficial ambitions. Thus we find a strong thread connecting writers of such diverse artistry as Mr. Joseph Conrad and Mr. Theodore Dreiser; Conrad, Titan among his contemporaries, working in larger spiritual dimensions, with greater insight, clarity, and control than any other living writer in English, and Dreiser, who in spite of the enormous drawbacks of a lumbering style and a tendency to indulge in heavy sentimentality that often becomes banal, nevertheless contrives to give a poignant sense of the bewildering welter of life.

Thus, too, no place is found in this volume for stories that illustrate short-cuts to astounding commercial success, however shrewd and interesting the cuts may be, or for stories that do nothing more than demonstrate, in the words of Mr. Carl Van Doren, "How childlike children are, how sisterly are sisters, how brotherly are brothers, how motherly are mothers, how fatherly are fathers, how grandmotherly and grandfatherly are grandmothers and grandfathers, and how loverly are all true lovers of whatever age, sex, color, or condition."

Any comparison that is attempted here between contemporary developments in the short story in England and contemporary developments in America must be a comparison

in highly generalized terms. On the whole the English short story, since the beginning of the century, has maintained an even course, untroubled by conspicuous deviations in any direction. A few brilliant figures have, of course, emerged. We in America have no one, for instance, to set beside Mr. Conrad and few enough to set beside Mr. Galsworthy, Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett, or Miss Mansfield. On the other hand the level of mediocrity in England has been rather strikingly below the level of mediocrity in America; we have produced a far larger number of writers capable of writing stories that are *almost* first class. Furthermore it is difficult to find the best specimens of the English short story among the work of men who are primarily short story writers. Better short stories have been written by Englishmen who do the great bulk of their work in the novel than by Englishmen who do the great bulk of their work in the short story.

English writers have never tended to regard the short story as the intricately articulated form that Americans have been conscious of. Indeed English writers have had far less reason to be conscious of the short story as a separate form at all. For one thing there has not been the stimulus to develop it independently that there has been in America; there has not been the vast popular-magazine-reading public to be served. Again it is possible that a difference in temperament has not disposed the Englishman to devote himself to a form that is primarily nervous and staccato. At all events there has not grown up in England a group of professional "short story" writers at all comparable in size to that in America.

Again and again in reading short stories by contemporary English writers one is made conscious that organic form is largely subordinated. Sometimes it hardly exists at all. The writer happens to become engaged upon a theme that requires

less expansive treatment than is needed to fill a novel. He begins to write and he tells his story, as far as it goes, and then he stops. Sometimes he has produced what to the American reader seems an "incident," sometimes a "character sketch," sometimes a portion of a novel. The Englishman calls it a "short story." "Short fiction" would be a better name, if we use "short story" in the American sense of the word. The contemporary English short story lacks "structure" (that ominous term which is so often made to mean a laborious and creaking preparation and building up of effects); it is episodic; compared to the American product it is less self-consciously dramatic. The emphasis is on character more often than on plot. As a result the whole thing seems more genuine; the exigencies of "complication," "climax," and "resolution" have not wrapped themselves so visibly about the English pen.

The American short story, on the other hand, has during the contemporary period developed structurally to a point where structure has threatened to swallow story. The popular demand for stories has been enormous and in the attempt to meet that demand structure, the easiest thing about story-writing to teach and to learn, because it is the most mechanical, the most tangible, and the most readily adaptable to classification, has been exaggerated beyond wisdom. As a result an army of deft "technicians," writing an acceptable, cut-to-pattern story, has until very lately impeded the progress of the more veracious workers in the field.

Let it be repeated once more, the general average of the American story has been higher than the general average of the English story. But the trouble has been that the American story has been content to stick at a general average; there has been too much standardization; the forest has engulfed the trees. This general average of stories has been marked



by very creditable skill in plot building, by very general avoidance of anything more than surface portraiture of character, and by an apparent touching belief on the part of the authors that what to them are the two main successes in life — success in love and success in livelihood — are completely and easily obtainable by anyone who will use his wits. That is in its way a healthy philosophy — for those incapable of anything subtler; it is, of course, evolutionary. But it has its limitations, and more than that, the authors who practice it generally fail to convince us that their characters, when they have won either or both of their successes, have won anything that they will be able to use to their souls' advantage.

Back of all this, of course, are the opulent American fiction magazines, read by millions of people who do not want to be "depressed," and back of it, too, is the era of commercial efficiency through which we have lately passed, the era which made of its subjects two demands: "get somewhere and get there with a bang," and "find the shortest cut." People wanted stories that got somewhere — got to perfectly definite and obvious points, that is — and got there by leaps and bounds; and writers sought the quickest and most "efficient" means of giving them those stories.

A significant product of the period is the American business story, that familiar and ingenuous tale of the young employee of the gigantic automobile factory or real estate firm or bond house, who, shrewd-wittedly, invents a new slogan or discovers an undreamed-of sales territory and thus short-cuts his way into economic bliss and perhaps, in passing, into matrimonial felicity as well.

There is, of course, no reason why the romance of modern business should not furnish ample and valuable material to writers of fiction, and I do not mean at all to imply that too

great a proportion of the American machine-made stories deals with business. What I do mean is that nearly the whole contemporary product is marked by a briskness, a specious glibness, a philosophy of quick returns, of which the business story furnishes the most extreme and at the same time the most typical example.

And from these stories, so pleasantly, so interestingly, and yet usually so emptily done, the reader can turn to adjacent columns in the same magazines and find there advertisements of correspondence schools that offer to teach anyone how to write more stories of exactly the same sort at the expense of only a little profitable pleasant labor at home after hours. It won't take long, anyone can learn to do it — always the short cut.

The correspondence school's connection with the short story is, of course, worth mentioning only in so far as it reflects an attitude. It is one of many indications that short story writing in America has been developed into a vast national industry, standardized like all vast industries, and turning out a standardized product. The mechanical elements of story construction have been so over-stressed that story-writing has come to be regarded as a purely mechanical process, something that is perfectly demonstrable. "Story" is interpreted as an entanglement of situations manipulated from the outside. Anyone can learn to do it. The result has been a product of high and soulless excellence.

There have been all along, it goes without saying, genuine exceptions to this practice of story-carpentering. The principal exceptions are represented within the covers of this book. And lately the exceptions have been multiplying. There are strong signs that the cut-to-pattern story has begun to die of its own super-development. Everywhere it is disappearing

from the magazines. In its place is growing up a more formless type of story that places its emphasis more largely on character and on character not necessarily involved in conspicuous or "tricky" situations but on character being aware. The character's stream of consciousness is coming more and more to engage the writer. That fact in itself signals greater freedom of form. And the character's acts are tending more and more to proceed legitimately from within the character and not to be forced upon the character from without.

The dominating and very noble theme of much contemporary fiction is escape, the effort of mind or body to break loose from influences that fetter it and to reach a sphere of freer play. It is inevitable that this impulse to escape, to seek release, so prevalent in the spirit of a literature, should sooner or later extend outward and affect the forms of the literature. This is what is beginning to happen in the case of the American short story. How far the change will go it is impossible to predict. At least the American short story will draw closer to the English short story on the side of freedom from structural requirements. And there are many indications that the short story in both England and America will eventually reach a point where the only difference between the short story and the novel is a difference in length. Why not? Arbitrary forms quickly exhaust their usefulness. For a while they serve as a stimulus to delicate artistry, but after a certain perfection has been reached they tend to become dead weights. Then it is time for freer latitudes.

In the choosing of material for an anthology or a "collection," personal liking, which is often and, quite properly, inexplicable, being a matter of very subtle chemistry, plays a

large part, although the wise collector usually tries to conceal the fact and hides behind rules of thumb. What troubles me in making my choice for this book, however, is not the fact that I like so well the stories I have put in, but the fact that I like so many others that I must leave out. I want, for instance, to include stories by Stacy Aumonier, J. D. Beresford, Algernon Blackwood, Sheila Kaye-Smith, Lennox Robinson, May Sinclair, Roland Pertwee, P. G. Wodehouse; by Thyra Samter Winslow, Sinclair Lewis, Ben Hecht, H. G. Dwight, Susan Glaspell, F. Scott Fitzgerald. I want to include stories by other writers too. But of all the stories that I might use certain ones stand forth with a kind of prevailing aristocracy. There are twenty-one of these; the following pages contain them.

KENNETH ALLAN ROBINSON



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# CONTEMPORARY SHORT STORIES



## MOTHER <sup>1</sup>

By SHERWOOD ANDERSON

ELIZABETH WILLARD, the mother of George Willard, was tall and gaunt and her face was marked with smallpox scars. Although she was but forty-five, some obscure disease had taken the fire out of her figure. Listlessly she went about the disorderly old hotel looking at the faded wall-paper and the ragged carpets and, when she was able to be about, doing the work of a chambermaid among beds soiled by the slumbers of fat traveling men. Her husband, Tom Willard, a slender, graceful man with square shoulders, a quick military step, and a black mustache, trained to turn sharply up at the ends, tried to put the wife out of his mind. The presence of the tall ghostly figure, moving slowly through the halls, he took as a reproach to himself. When he thought of her he grew angry and swore. The hotel was unprofitable and forever on the edge of failure and he wished himself out of it. He thought of the old house and the woman who lived there with him as things defeated and done for. The hotel in which he had begun life so hopefully was now a mere ghost of what a hotel should be. As he went spruce and businesslike through the streets of Winesburg, he sometimes stopped and turned quickly about as though

<sup>1</sup> From *Winesburg, Ohio*, by Sherwood Anderson. Copyright, 1919, by B. W. Huebsch. Reprinted by special arrangement.

fearing that the spirit of the hotel and of the woman would follow him even into the streets. "Damn such a life, damn it!" he sputtered aimlessly.

Tom Willard had a passion for village politics and for years had been the leading Democrat in a strongly Republican community. Some day, he told himself, the tide of things political will turn in my favor and the years of ineffectual service count big in the bestowal of rewards. He dreamed of going to Congress and even of becoming governor. Once when a younger member of the party arose at a political conference and began to boast of his faithful service, Tom Willard grew white with fury. "Shut up, you," he roared, glaring about. "What do you know of service? What are you but a boy? Look at what I've done here! I was a Democrat here in Winesburg when it was a crime to be a Democrat. In the old days they fairly hunted us with guns."

Between Elizabeth and her one son George there was a deep unexpressed bond of sympathy, based on a girlhood dream that had long ago died. In the son's presence she was timid and reserved, but sometimes while he hurried about town intent upon his duties as a reporter, she went into his room and closing the door knelt by a little desk, made of a kitchen table, that sat near a window. In the room by the desk she went through a ceremony that was half a prayer, half a demand, addressed to the skies. In the boyish figure she yearned to see something half forgotten that had once been a part of herself recreated. The prayer concerned that. "Even though I die, I will in some way keep defeat from you," she cried, and so deep was her determination that her whole body shook. Her eyes glowed and she clenched her fists. "If I am dead and see him becoming a meaningless drab figure like myself, I will come back," she declared. "I ask God now to give me that



privilege. I demand it. I will pay for it. God may beat me with his fists. I will take any blow that may befall if but this my boy be allowed to express something for us both." Pausing uncertainly, the woman stared about the boy's room. "And do not let him become smart and successful either," she added vaguely.

The communion between George Willard and his mother was outwardly a formal thing without meaning. When she was ill and sat by the window in her room he sometimes went in the evening to make her a visit. They sat by a window that looked over the roof of a small frame building into Main Street. By turning their heads they could see, through another window, along an alleyway that ran behind the Main Street stores and into the back door of Abner Groff's bakery. Sometimes as they sat thus a picture of village life presented itself to them. At the back door of his shop appeared Abner Groff with a stick or an empty milk bottle in his hand. For a long time there was a feud between the baker and a grey cat that belonged to Sylvester West, the druggist. The boy and his mother saw the cat creep into the door of the bakery and presently emerge followed by the baker who swore and waved his arms about. The baker's eyes were small and red and his black hair and beard were filled with flour dust. Sometimes he was so angry that, although the cat had disappeared, he hurled sticks, bits of broken glass, and even some of the tools of his trade about. Once he broke a window at the back of Sinning's Hardware Store. In the alley the grey cat crouched behind barrels filled with torn paper and broken bottles above which flew a black swarm of flies. Once when she was alone, and after watching a prolonged and ineffectual outburst on the part of the baker, Elizabeth Willard put her head down on her long white hands and wept. After that she did not look

along the alleyway any more, but tried to forget the contest between the bearded man and the cat. It seemed like a rehearsal of her own life, terrible in its vividness.

In the evening when the son sat in the room with his mother, the silence made them both feel awkward. Darkness came on and the evening train came in at the station. In the street below feet tramped up and down upon a board sidewalk. In the station yard, after the evening train had gone, there was a heavy silence. Perhaps Skinner Leason, the express agent, moved a truck the length of the station platform. Over on Main Street sounded a man's voice, laughing. The door of the express office banged. George Willard arose and crossing the room fumbled for the doorknob. Sometimes he knocked against a chair, making it scrape along the floor. By the window sat the sick woman, perfectly still, listless. Her long hands, white and bloodless, could be seen drooping over the ends of the arms of the chair. "I think you had better be out among the boys. You are too much indoors," she said, striving to relieve the embarrassment of the departure. "I thought I would take a walk," replied George Willard, who felt awkward and confused.

One evening in July, when the transient guests who made the New Willard House their temporary homes had become scarce, and the hallways, lighted only by kerosene lamps turned low, were plunged in gloom, Elizabeth Willard had an adventure. She had been ill in bed for several days and her son had not come to visit her. She was alarmed. The feeble blaze of life that remained in her body was blown into a flame by her anxiety and she crept out of bed, dressed and hurried along the hallway toward her son's room, shaking with exaggerated fears. As she went along she steadied herself with her hand, slipped along the papered walls of the hall and breathed with

difficulty. The air whistled through her teeth. As she hurried forward she thought how foolish she was. "He is concerned with boyish affairs," she told herself. "Perhaps he has now begun to walk about in the evening with girls."

Elizabeth Willard had a dread of being seen by guests in the hotel that had once belonged to her father and the ownership of which still stood recorded in her name in the county courthouse. The hotel was continually losing patronage because of its shabbiness and she thought of herself as also shabby. Her own room was in an obscure corner, and when she felt able to work she voluntarily worked among the beds, preferring the labor that could be done when the guests were abroad seeking trade among the merchants of Winesburg.

By the door of her son's room the mother knelt upon the floor and listened for some sound from within. When she heard the boy moving about and talking in low tones a smile came to her lips. George Willard had a habit of talking aloud to himself and to hear him doing so had always given his mother a peculiar pleasure. The habit in him, she felt, strengthened the secret bond that existed between them. A thousand times she had whispered to herself of the matter. "He is groping about, trying to find himself," she thought. "He is not a dull clod, all words and smartness. Within him there is a secret something that is striving to grow. It is the thing I let be killed in myself."

In the darkness in the hallway by the door the sick woman arose and started again toward her own room. She was afraid that the door would open and the boy come upon her. When she had reached a safe distance and was about to turn a corner into a second hallway she stopped and bracing herself with her hands waited, thinking to shake off a trembling fit of weakness that had come upon her. The presence of the boy in the

room had made her happy. In her bed, during the long hours alone, the little fears that had visited her had become giants. Now they were all gone. "When I get back to my room I shall sleep," she murmured gratefully.

But Elizabeth Willard was not to return to her bed and to sleep. As she stood trembling in the darkness the door of her son's room opened and the boy's father, Tom Willard, stepped out. In the light that streamed out at the door he stood with the knob in his hand and talked. What he said infuriated the woman.

Tom Willard was ambitious for his son. He had always thought of himself as a successful man, although nothing he had ever done had turned out successfully. However, when he was out of sight of the New Willard House and had no fear of coming upon his wife, he swaggered and began to dramatize himself as one of the chief men of the town. He wanted his son to succeed. He it was who had secured for the boy the position on the *Winesburg Eagle*. Now, with a ring of earnestness in his voice, he was advising concerning some course of conduct. "I tell you what, George, you've got to wake up," he said sharply. "Will Henderson has spoken to me three times concerning the matter. He says you go along for hours not hearing when you are spoken to and acting like a gawky girl. What ails you?" Tom Willard laughed good-naturedly. "Well, I guess you'll get over it," he said. "I told Will that. You're not a fool and you're not a woman. You're Tom Willard's son and you'll wake up. I'm not afraid. What you say clears things up. If being a newspaper man had put the notion of becoming a writer into your mind that's all right. Only I guess you'll have to wake up to do that too, eh?"

Tom Willard went briskly along the hallway and down a flight of stairs to the office. The woman in the darkness could

hear him laughing and talking with a guest who was striving to wear away a dull evening by dozing in a chair by the office door. She returned to the door of her son's room. The weakness had passed from her body as by a miracle and she stepped boldly along. A thousand ideas raced through her head. When she heard the scraping of a chair and the sound of a pen scratching upon paper, she again turned and went back along the hallway to her own room.

A definite determination had come into the mind of the defeated wife of the Winesburg Hotel keeper. The determination was the result of long years of quiet and rather ineffectual thinking. "Now," she told herself, "I will act. There is something threatening my boy and I will ward it off." The fact that the conversation between Tom Willard and his son had been rather quiet and natural, as though an understanding existed between them, maddened her. Although for years she had hated her husband, her hatred had always before been a quite impersonal thing. He had been merely a part of something else that she hated. Now, and by the few words at the door, he had become the thing personified. In the darkness of her own room she clenched her fists and glared about. Going to a cloth bag that hung on a nail by the wall she took out a long pair of sewing scissors and held them in her hand like a dagger. "I will stab him," she said aloud. "He has chosen to be the voice of evil and I will kill him. When I have killed him something will snap within myself and I will die also. It will be a release for all of us."

In her girlhood and before her marriage with Tom Willard, Elizabeth had borne a somewhat shaky reputation in Winesburg. For years she had been what is called "stage-struck" and had paraded through the streets with traveling men guests at her father's hotel, wearing loud clothes and urging them to



tell her of life in the cities out of which they had come. Once she startled the town by putting on men's clothes and riding a bicycle down Main Street.

In her own mind the tall dark girl had been in those days much confused. A great restlessness was in her and it expressed itself in two ways. First there was an uneasy desire for change, for some big definite movement to her life. It was this feeling that had turned her mind to the stage. She dreamed of joining some company and wandering over the world, seeing always new faces and giving something out of herself to all people. Sometimes at night she was quite beside herself with the thought, but when she tried to talk of the matter to the members of the theatrical companies that came to Winesburg and stopped at her father's hotel, she got nowhere. They did not seem to know what she meant, or if she did get something of her passion expressed, they only laughed. "It's not like that," they said. "It's as dull and uninteresting as this here. Nothing comes of it."

With the traveling men when she walked about with them, and later with Tom Willard, it was quite different. Always they seemed to understand and sympathize with her. On the side streets of the village, in the darkness under the trees, they took hold of her hand and she thought that something unexpressed in herself came forth and became a part of an unexpressed something in them.

And then there was the second expression of her restlessness. When that came she felt for a time released and happy. She did not blame the men who walked with her and later she did not blame Tom Willard. It was always the same, beginning with kisses and ending, after strange, wild emotions, with peace and then sobbing repentance. When she sobbed she put her hand upon the face of the man and had always the same

thought. Even though he were large and bearded she thought he had become suddenly a little boy. She wondered why he did not sob also.

In her room, tucked away in a corner of the old Willard House, Elizabeth Willard lighted a lamp and put it on a dressing table that stood by the door. A thought had come into her mind and she went to a closet and brought out a small square box and set it on the table. The box contained material for make-up and had been left with other things by a theatrical company that had once been stranded in Winesburg. Elizabeth Willard had decided that she would be beautiful. Her hair was still black and there was a great mass of it braided and coiled about her head. The scene that was to take place in the office below began to grow in her mind. No ghostly worn-out figure should confront Tom Willard, but something quite unexpected and startling. Tall and with dusky cheeks and hair that fell in a mass from her shoulders, a figure should come striding down the stairway before the startled loungers in the hotel office. The figure would be silent — it would be swift and terrible. As a tigress whose cub had been threatened would she appear, coming out of the shadows, stealing noiselessly along and holding the long wicked scissors in her hand.

With a little broken sob in her throat, Elizabeth Willard blew out the light that stood upon the table and stood weak and trembling in the darkness. The strength that had been as a miracle in her body left and she half reeled across the floor, clutching at the back of the chair in which she had spent so many long days staring out over the tin roofs into the main street of Winesburg. In the hallway there was the sound of footsteps and George Willard came in at the door. Sitting in a chair beside his mother he began to talk. "I'm going to get

out of here," he said. "I don't know where I shall go or what I shall do but I am going away."

The woman in the chair waited and trembled. An impulse came to her. "I suppose you had better wake up," she said. "You think that? You will go to the city and make money, eh? It will be better for you, you think, to be a business man, to be brisk and smart and alive?" She waited and trembled.

The son shook his head. "I suppose I can't make you understand, but oh, I wish I could," he said earnestly. "I can't even talk to father about it. I don't try. There isn't any use. I don't know what I shall do. I just want to go away and look at people and think."

Silence fell upon the room where the boy and woman sat together. Again, as on the other evenings, they were embarrassed. After a time the boy tried again to talk. "I suppose it won't be for a year or two but I've been thinking about it," he said, rising and going toward the door. "Something father said makes it sure that I shall have to go away." He fumbled with the doorknob. In the room the silence became unbearable to the woman. She wanted to cry out with joy because of the words that had come from the lips of her son, but the expression of joy had become impossible to her. "I think you had better go out among the boys. You are too much indoors," she said. "I thought I would go for a little walk," replied the son stepping awkwardly out of the room and closing the door.

## THE IDIOT<sup>1</sup>

By ARNOLD BENNETT

WILLIAM FROYLE, ostler at the Queen's Arms at Moorthorne, took the letter, and, with a curt nod which stifled the loquacity of the village postman, went at once from the yard into the coach-house. He had recognised the hand-writing on the envelope, and the recognition of it gave form and quick life to all the vague suspicions that had troubled him some months before, and again during the last few days. He felt suddenly the near approach of a frightful calamity which had long been stealing towards him.

A wire-sheathed lantern, set on a rough oaken table, cast a wavering light round the coach-house, and dimly showed the inner stable. Within the latter could just be distinguished the mottled-grey flanks of a fat cob which dragged its chain occasionally, making the large slow movements of a horse comfortably lodged in its stall. The pleasant odour of animals and hay filled the wide spaces of the shed, and through the half-open door came a fresh thin mist rising from the rain-soaked yard in the November evening.

Froyle sat down on the oaken table, his legs dangling, and looked again at the envelope before opening it. He was a man about thirty years of age, with a serious and thoughtful, rather heavy countenance. He had a long light moustache, and his skin was a fresh, rosy salmon colour; his straw-tinted hair was cut very short, except over the forehead, where it grew

<sup>1</sup> From *Matador of the Five Towns*, by Arnold Bennett. Reprinted by permission of George H. Doran Company, Publishers of Arnold Bennett's works in the United States.

full and bushy. Dressed in his rough stable corduroys, his forearms bare and white, he had all the appearance of the sturdy Englishman, the sort of Englishman that crosses the world in order to find vent for his taciturn energy on virgin soils. From the whole village he commanded and received respect. He was known for a scholar, and it was his scholarship which had obtained for him the proud position of secretary to the provident society styled the Queen's Arms Slate Club. His respectability and his learning combined had enabled him to win with dignity the hand of Susie Trimmer, the grocer's daughter, to whom he had been engaged about a year. The village could not make up its mind concerning that match; without doubt it was a social victory for Froyle, but everyone wondered that so sedate and sagacious a man should have seen in Susie a suitable mate.

He tore open the envelope with his huge forefinger, and, bending down towards the lantern, began to read the letter. It ran:

“OLDCASTLE STREET, BURSLEY.

“DEAR WILL:

“I asked father to tell you, but he would not. He said I must write. Dear Will, I hope you will never see me again. As you will see by the above address, I am now at Aunt Penrose's at Bursley. She is awful angry, but I was obliged to leave the village because of my shame. I have been a wicked girl. It was in July. You know the man, because you asked me about him one Sunday night. He is no good. He is a villain. Please forget all about me. I want to go to London. So many people know me here, and what with people coming in from the village, too. Please forgive me.

“S. TRIMMER.”



After reading the letter a second time, Froyle folded it up and put it in his pocket. Beyond a slight unaccustomed pallor of the red cheeks, he showed no sign of emotion. Before the arrival of the postman he had been cleaning his master's bicycle, which stood against the table. To this he returned. Kneeling down in some fresh straw, he used his dusters slowly and patiently — rubbing, then stooping to examine the result, and then rubbing again. When the machine was polished to his satisfaction, he wheeled it carefully into the stable, where it occupied a stall next to that of the cob. As he passed back again, the animal leisurely turned his head and gazed at Froyle with its large liquid eyes. He slapped the immense flank. Content, the animal returned to its feed, and the weighted chain ran down with a rattle.

The fortnightly meeting of the Slate Club was to take place at eight o'clock that evening. Froyle had employed part of the afternoon in making ready his books for the event, to him always so solemn and ceremonious; and the affairs of the club were now prominent in his mind. He was sorry that it would be impossible for him to attend the meeting; fortunately, all the usual preliminaries were complete.

He took a piece of notepaper from a little hanging cupboard, and, sprawling across the table, began to write under the lantern. The pencil seemed a tiny toy in his thick roughened fingers:

*"To Mr. Andrew McCall, Chairman Queen's Arms Slate Club.*

"DEAR SIR: I regret to inform you that I shall not be at the meeting to-night. You will find the books in order . . ."

Here he stopped, biting the end of the pencil in thought. He put down the pencil and stepped hastily out of the stable,

across the yard, and into the hotel. In the large room, the room where cyclists sometimes took tea and cold meat during the summer season, the long deal table and the double line of oaken chairs stood ready for the meeting. A fire burnt warmly in the big grate, and the hanging lamp had been lighted. On the wall was a large card containing the rules of the club, which had been written out in a fair hand by the schoolmaster. It was to this card that Froyle went. Passing his thumb down the card, he paused at Rule VII:

“Each member shall, on the death of another member, pay 1s. for benefit of widow or nominee of deceased, same to be paid within one month of notice given.”

“Or nominee — nominee,” he murmured reflectively, staring at the card. He mechanically noticed, what he had noticed often before with disdain, that the chairman had signed the rules without the use of capitals.

He went back to the dusk of the coach-house to finish his letter, still murmuring the word “nominee,” of whose meaning he was not quite sure:

“I request that the money due to me from the Slate Club on my death shall be paid to my nominee, Miss Susan Trimmer, now staying with her aunt, Mrs. Penrose, at Bursley.

“Yours respectfully,

“WILLIAM FROYLE.”

After further consideration he added:

“P.S. — My annual salary of sixpence per member would be due at the end of December: if so be the members would pay

that, or part of it, should they consider the same due, to Susan Trimmer as well, I should be thankful. — Yours resp., W. F.”

He put the letter in an envelope, and, taking it to the large room, laid it carefully at the end of the table opposite the chairman's seat. Once more he returned to the coach-house. From the hanging cupboard he now produced a piece of rope. Standing on the table he could just reach, by leaning forward, a hook in the ceiling, that was sometimes used for the slinging of bicycles. With difficulty he made the rope fast to the hook. Putting a noose on the other end, he tightened it round his neck. He looked up at the ceiling and down at the floor in order to judge whether the rope was short enough.

“Good-bye, Susan, and everyone,” he whispered, and then stepped off the table.

The tense rope swung him by his neck half-way across the coach-house. He swung twice to and fro, but as he passed under the hook for the fifth time his shoes touched the floor. The rope had stretched. In another second he was standing firm on the floor, purple and panting, but ignominiously alive.

“Good-even to you, Mr. Froyle. Be you committing suicide?” The tones were drawling, uncertain, mildly astonished.

He turned round hastily, his hands busy with the rope, and saw in the doorway the figure of Daft Jimmy, the Moorthorne idiot.

He hesitated before speaking, but he was not confused. No one could have been confused before Daft Jimmy. Neither man nor woman in the village considered his presence more than that of a cat.

“Yes, I am,” he said.

The middle-aged idiot regarded him with a vague, interested smile, and came into the coach-house.

"You'n gotten the rope too long, Mr. Froyle. Let me help you."

Froyle calmly assented. He stood on the table, and the two rearranged the noose and made it secure. As they did so the idiot gossiped:

"I was going to Bursley to-night to buy me a pair o' boots, and when I was at top o' th' hill I remembered as I'd forgotten the measure o' my feet. So I ran back again for it. Then I saw the light in here, and I stepped up to bid ye good-evening."

Someone had told him the ancient story of the fool and his boots, and with the pride of an idiot in his idiocy, he had determined that it should be related of himself.

Froyle was silent.

The idiot laughed with a dry cackle.

"Now you go," said Froyle, when the rope was fixed.

"Let me see ye do it," the idiot pleaded with pathetic eyes.

"No; out you get!"

Protesting, the idiot went forth, and his irregular clumsy footsteps sounded on the pebble-paved yard. When the noise of them ceased in the soft roadway, Froyle jumped off the table again. Gradually his body, like a stopping pendulum, came to rest under the hook, and hung twitching, with strange disconnected movements. The horse in the stable, hearing unaccustomed noises, rattled his chain and stamped about in the straw of his box.

Furtive steps came down the yard again, and Daft Jimmy peeped into the coach-house.

"He done it! he done it!" the idiot cried gleefully. "Damned if he hasna'." He slapped his leg and almost danced. The body still twitched occasionally. "He done it!"

"Done what, Daft Jimmy? You're making a fine noise there! Done what?"

The idiot ran out of the stable. At the side-entrance to the hotel stood the bar-maid, the outline of her fine figure distinct against the light from within.

The idiot continued to laugh.

"Done what?" the girl repeated, calling out against the dark yard in clear, pleasant tones of amused inquiry. "Done what?"

"What's that to you, Miss Tucker?"

"Now, none of your sauce, Daft Jimmy! Is Willie Froyle in there?"

The idiot roared with laughter.

"Yes, he is, miss."

"Well, tell him his master wants him. I don't want to cross this mucky, messy yard."

"Yes, miss."

The girl closed the door.

The idiot went into the coach-house, and, slapping William's body in a friendly way so that it trembled on the rope, he spluttered out between his laughs:

"Master wants ye, Mr. Froyle."

Then he walked out into the village street, and stood looking up the muddy road, still laughing quietly. It was quite dark, but the moon aloft in the clear sky showed the highway with its shining ruts leading in a straight line over the hill to Bursley.

"Them shoes!" the idiot ejaculated suddenly. "Well, I be an idiot, and that's true! They can take the measure from my feet, and I never thought on it till this minute!"

Laughing again, he set off at a run up the hill.



## THE SIGN OF THE LAMP<sup>1</sup>

By THOMAS BURKE

HERE, O hearts that beat with mine, is the saddest of all tales. It is the tale of the breaking of a man's faith in woman. A thousand arrows over their places of slumber. . . .

It was on the Bund of Shanghai that the father of Sway Lim had said these words to him: "Son, mistrust all white women; they are but pale devils; they shall ensnare you."

But Lim had not listened; and it was Poppy Sturdish, of Limehouse and Poplar, who proved to him that his father spoke truth. Poppy was fair in the eyes of a Chinaman; she was an anæmic slip of a girl, with coarse skin and mean mouth, a frightened manner and a defiant glance. She had scarce any friends, for she was known to be a copper's mark; thus came the fear in her step and the challenge in her eyes. Often she had blown the gaff on the secret games of Chinatown, for she spoke Cantonese and little Swahili and some Hindustani, and could rustle it with the best of them; and it was her skill and shrewdness in directing the law to useful enterprises, such as the raiding of wicked houses, that caused her to be known in all local stations and courts as the Chinese Poppy.

She lived in the tactfully narrow Poplar High Street, that curls its nasty length from Limehouse to Blackwall, and directly opposite her cottage was the loathly lodging of Sway Lim — one room, black and smelly with dirt — next the home of the sailors of Japan. From his open window he could see into the room of the desirable Poppy, and by day and evening

<sup>1</sup> From *Limehouse Nights*, by Thomas Burke. Copyright by Robert M. McBride & Company. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

he would sit there, watching her movements, and listening with delight to her chief charm — that voice of hers that wailed in your heart long since it had ceased to wail in your ears. She was a bad girl, mean and treacherous; everybody knew that; but she was young and very pale; so that Sway Lim, wet-lipped, would gloat upon her from his window. Sometimes he would pluck at his plaintive fiddle, and make a song for her. Over the sad, yellow evening his voice would float in an old Malayan chanty:

*"Love is kind to the least of men. . . .  
Eee-awa! Eee-awa!"*

But a little while, and she had consented to walk with Lim, and to visit the Queen's Theatre, and to take drinks — double gins — at the Blue Lantern. From him she accepted brooches and rings wherewith to deck the beauty of her twenty-five years; and when she questioned him whence he had the money for these things, he told her that he played fan-tan at the house of Ho Ling. This he did either not knowing or not caring that Poppy was a copper's nark, and was under the sharp thumb of an inspector. He talked to Poppy as he had talked to none outside his native land. He told her of his home, of his childhood, of his prolific and wonderful parent, who had twelve mighty sons. He talked of a land of lilies and soft blue nights which he had left that he might adventure in strange countries, and see the beauties of the white girls of other lands, and learn great things, as befitted the first son of a great house. He told her how well he played fan-tan, where he played it, and at what times, how many tricks he had acquired, and the heap plenty money he had made. And he sang to her: *Yao chien wo ngai tzu nu.*

All these things he told her in successive sweet evenings of June, when Limehouse was a city of rose and silver, and the

odour of exotic spices lured every sense to the secret amiable delights of the pillow. All these things he told her; yet was he surprised when one night there came a knocking at the lower door of the house of Ho Ling, and a knocking at the back door of the house of Ho Ling, and a knocking at the upper door of the house of Ho Ling, and the ominously casual entrance of burly gentlemen in racing overcoats, bowler hats, and large boots. He was surprised when he was hauled away to a station, and detained for the night in the cells, and taken thence to Thames Police Court. Was he surprised when he saw the Chinese Poppy in court, chatting affably with the most important-looking gentleman in racing overcoat and bowler hat? He was not. His heart broke within him, and all emotion died. Tears came to his throat, but not to his eyes, so that when the interpreter questioned him, he could make no answer; his dignity dropped from him; he could but glare and mumble. "I loved her," his heart cried silently; "I loved her, and she betrayed me. Treachery. Treachery." And his companions in the dock, who, too, had warned him against the white girl, wagged wise, condemnatory heads that would have declared: "We told you so."

His heart was broken by a white barbarian devil of a girl; and he addressed himself forthwith, quietly and tenderly, to vengeance. He paid his fine, and those of his companions, for he alone had sufficient money to save them from prison; and then he went home to his chamber, walking to a monotonous march of: "Treachery. Treachery." As he turned into Poplar High Street he came upon Poppy, walking with a beefy youth, who glowered and looked very strong. As Poppy passed, she lifted a slim, white hand, smacked the face of Sway Lim, and, with delicate, cruel fingers, pulled the nose of Sway Lim.

It was enough. If a broken heart had not been enough, then

this assault had crowned it. His holy of holies, his personal dignity, his nose, had been degraded. All the wrath of his fathers foamed in his blood. All the tears of the ages rushed over his heart. Innumerable little agonies scorched his flesh. Silently, swiftly, he crouched into himself as a tortoise into its shell, and, followed by the brute laughter of the beefy youth, he slipped by dark corners away.

Once in his chamber, he bowed himself before the joss, and burned many prayer papers that the powers might be propitiated and pleased to forward his schemes.

. . . . .

Now it was not long before the gentle, wet lips of Sway Lim had won from other lips, less gentle, but well moistened with beer and gin, certain things good to be known concerning Poppy Sturdish, or Chinese Poppy. He learnt that her heart and the beautiful body of her, loaded with infinite pale graces that never a yellow man might discover, had been freely rendered to another; not to the Inspector, but to a greater personage of Poplar: none other than the beefy youth, Hunk Bottles.

Hunk Bottles was not a good man. The life he led was not clean. He robbed and bashed. It was rumoured that he had done worse deeds, too, by night; but, as the leader of the Hunk Bottles Gang, and the sower of strife among the labourers, white, black, brown and yellow, of the docks, he was a fellow of some consequence, and there were times when the police looked steadily in the opposite direction when he approached.

But there was at last a day when public sentiment demanded that all local and personal considerations be set aside, and that Hunk Bottles be apprehended. For it had come to pass that murder had been done in Chinatown, in a nasty house near

Pennyfields, where men played cards and other games, and sometimes quarrelled among themselves; and the police sought the murderer and found him not. Only they found in the hand of the murdered man half the sleeve of a coat; a coat of good material, a material which a local tailor recognised because he used very little of it, and had but two customers for it. One was his own father, the other was Hunk Bottles.

But Hunk Bottles had flown, and none knew whither. Yet there were two who could have made very shrewd guesses. One of these sat, with a broken heart, evening by evening, at his window, watching the opposite window, where sometimes a soft shape would dance across the blind, and dance with trampling feet upon his poor heart. Sometimes the door would open, and she would go forth, and he would watch her, and when she was gone, he would continue to watch the way she was gone, and would sit until she returned. Sometimes her window would open, too, and she would shoot a spiteful head through it, and cry to him, in her own rich tongue, that all yellow swine were offal to her. This man knew where Hunk Bottles might be found, for he had seen Hunk Bottles creep to the opposite door, at the dark hour of two in the morning, and he had seen a lowered light, had heard the crackle of a whisper, and the sweet hiss of stormy kisses showered upon the white body of Poppy, and her murmurous defiance: "I won't give you up. Never. Never. Never. Take me dyin' oath I won't. Not if they kill me, Hunk. 'Ope I'm in 'ell first."

Very swiftly the story spread through Limehouse from gentle Chinese lips, and it came, in less than an hour, to the police station. Fifteen minutes later the important gentleman in racing overcoat and bowler hat called upon Poppy, and challenged her. And when he had challenged her, he charged her with a mission. At first she was truculent; then sullen; then



complacent. She took her dyin' oath that she didn't know where Hunk was. She only knew that he had been to her twice, very late at night. She did not know where he came from, or where he went. She was in deadly fear of him. Of course she ought to have give him up, but how could she? He'd split her throat. He carried a gun and knives. He'd do her in at once if he suspected. What *could* she do?

They talked . . . and talked. The Inspector's large hand moved emphatically, patting the table as he made certain points.

"Don't try to tell me," he urged, in the off-hand way of the police officer. "I know all about it. You do what you got to do, and you needn't be frightened of nobody. And you better do it, I give you my word, me gel; I got you fixed good and tight. So watch out. And don't forget nothing. Now then . . . what's your orders?"

In a dull, cold voice Poppy repeated a formula. "Put the lamp in the window, with the red shade on. When I got his gun and his two knives off him, I take the shade away. Then you comes in."

"That's it. Why, it's as easy. . . . Just a little lovey-lovey. Kinder lead him on. Then sit him down on that there sofa, and love him some more. Then he'll take off his belt, and other things. When he's got his coat off, with the gun in it, get him over this side away from it. Never mind about the knives; he won't get a chanst to use them. Then you put your hand up, to straighten your hair, like, and knock the shade off, accidental.

"Now mind yeh. . . . No hanky-panky. Else I'll have to do it on yeh as I ought to have done years ago. So mind yeh. I ain't standing any khybosh. Not in these nor any other trousers. You do what you're told, and things'll be all the

better for you for a long time to come. We shall be outside from now till he comes. So don't try to slip out and bung him the word. It won't be no good. And above all, don't try to get gay with me. See? Ever read your Bible? Read it now, 'fore he comes. There's a yarn about a chap called Samson, and his gel Delilah. Tells you just how to do it!"

He had just snapped his last phrase when there came to both of them, very sharp and clear, the wailing of a Malayan chanty:

*"Love is kind to the least of men. . . .  
Eee-awa! Eee-awa!"*

Instinctively both looked up, and then they saw that the window was wide to the street, and at the opposite open window was a yellow face and head which blinked at them impassively under the hard morning light, and continued its melancholy entertainment.

A few long hours followed, and then came Hunk Bottles, perilously, slipperily. He was whisked into the house as by a gust of wind, while in several grim corners several gentlemen in racing overcoats and bowler hats, and one in uniform, grinned quietly. For now it was Poppy's charge to deliver the boy to his tormentors, and she should very terribly cop out if she failed in that charge.

That, however, was exactly what she meant to do. He had come, her own, very own Hunk; and she must get him away. Hunk and herself would escape or die together; and, if they died, several gentlemen in racing overcoats and bowler hats should die with them. There was a back entrance to her little house. The Inspector had not thought to post men there; after all, she was a copper's nark, and he assumed that he had fairly frightened her by his instructions that morning. He had overlooked the fact that Poppy was a London girl, and that

she loved Hunk Bottles. He had forgotten that the state of love is so very near to the state of death.

The moment Hunk was in her room, she spoke swift words to him. She told him of his peril; she told him of the instructions given to her. She repeated her oath of allegiance, and detailed her plan for escape.

"They'll have to kill me first, Hunk. Sop me gob they will. I'm never going back on yeh. Never!" And she flung hot little arms about him, letting him play with her as he would while he urged her to pull herself together. When she had finished assaulting his scrubby face with wet kisses, she asked him if he had got his gun and his two knives, and he assured her that he had, as well as a knuckle-duster. And she asked him if he would make a fight for it if they were caught, and he said he would, and groaned aloud when she forced him to promise that, if the fight were lost, he would put her out before the cops could get her. They embraced again, and he sobbed soft things to her beauty and her faithfulness.

Then she took the lamp from the table, set the red shade very firmly upon it, and placed it in the window.

"Half-a-mo', Hunk," she whispered. "I'll just slip away to the back, and make sure all's clear." She turned her face up to him as she retreated, and its pallor shone as though some sudden lamp of life had been lit within her, and a lonely Chinky at the opposite window groaned in his heart that no woman had ever given such a look to him.

But his face remained impassive, and, the moment she was gone from the room, he thrust across the narrow street a stiff, straight wire such as is used for fishing on the Great Yellow River, and so finely drawn that nothing could be seen of it in the road below.

Of a sudden the red shade of the lamp was twitched off.

Swiftly from their corners came several gentlemen in racing overcoats and bowler hats, one of whom carried a key. The door of the house was opened, and they disappeared. Ten seconds later they stood before Hunk Bottles, and Sway Lim at his window, breathing the scents of manioc and pickled eggs, saw them very clearly. He saw the sudden dismay on the face of the prisoner, and heard the sharp cry: "Copped, be Christ!" And then: "So she went to fetch yeh, the bitch!"

He saw him drop both hands in a gesture of surrender, and step forward. At the same moment, in the doorway appeared the pale, anguished figure of Poppy. She grasped the situation, and a spasm in her face showed that she grasped the awful construction that Hunk had placed upon it. She raised a protesting hand. Her lips moved as if to speak.

But Hunk, his face on fire with fury, grief and despair at this assumed betrayal by the woman he loved, waved her coldly away. He took his gun from his pocket, and handed it to the Inspector, who had held him covered. Poppy darted forward, but was dragged back. She screamed. Then, mercifully, she fainted; and did not hear, across the cruel night, a ripple of cold Oriental laughter and a voice that wailed an old Malayan chanty:

*"Love is kind to the least of men. . . .  
Eee-awa! Eee-awa!"*

## PORTRAIT OF A PHILOSOPHER<sup>1</sup>

By DOROTHY CANFIELD

### I

THE news of Professor Gridley's death filled Middletown College with consternation. Its one claim to distinction was gone, for in spite of the excessive quiet of his private life, he had always cast about the obscure little college the shimmering aura of greatness. There had been no fondness possible for the austere old thinker, but Middletown village, as well as the college, had been touched by his fidelity to the very moderate attractions of his birthplace. When, as often happened, some famous figure was seen on the streets, people used to say first, "Here to see old Grid, I suppose," and then, "Funny how he sticks here. They say he was offered seven thousand at the University of California." In the absence of any known motive for this steadfastness, the village legend-making instinct had evolved a theory that he did not wish to move away from a State of which his father had been Governor, and where the name of Gridley was like a patent of nobility.

And now he was gone, the last of the race. His disappearance caused the usual amount of reminiscent talk among his neighbors. The older people recalled the by-gone scandals connected with his notorious and popular father and intimated with knowing nods that there were plenty of other descendants of the old Governor who were not entitled legally to bear the name; but the younger ones, who had known only the severely

<sup>1</sup> From *Hillsboro People*, by Dorothy Canfield. Copyright by Henry Holt and Company. Reprinted by special permission.



ascetic life and cold personality of the celebrated scholar, found it difficult to connect him with such a father. In their talk they brought to mind the man himself, his queer shabby clothes, his big stooping frame, his sad black eyes, absent almost to vacancy as though always fixed on high and distant thoughts; and those who had lived near him told laughing stories about the crude and countrified simplicity of his old aunt's house-keeping — it was said that the president of Harvard had been invited to join them once in a Sunday evening meal of crackers and milk — but the general tenor of feeling was, as it had been during his life, of pride in his great fame and in the celebrated people who had come to see him.

This pride warmed into something like affection when, the day after his death, came the tidings that he had bequeathed to his college the Gino Sprague Fallères portrait of himself. Of course, at that time, no one in Middletown had seen the picture, for the philosopher's sudden death had occurred, very dramatically, actually during the last sitting. He had, in fact, had barely one glimpse of it himself, as, according to Fallères's invariable rule, no one, not even the subject of the portrait, had been allowed to examine an unfinished piece of work. But, though Middletown had no first-hand knowledge of the picture, there could be no doubt about the value of the canvas. As soon as it was put on exhibition in London, from every art-critic in the three nations who claimed Fallères for their own there rose a wail that this masterpiece was to be buried in an unknown college in an obscure village in barbarous America. It was confidently stated that it would be saved from such an unfitting resting-place by strong action on the part of an International Committee of Artists; but Middletown, though startled by its own good fortune, clung with Yankee tenacity to its rights. Raphael Collin, of Paris, commenting on this in the *Revue des*

*Deux Mondes*, cried out whimsically upon the woes of an art-critic's life, "as if there were not already enough wearisome pilgrimages necessary to remote and uncomfortable places with jaw-breaking names, which must nevertheless be visited for the sake of a single picture!" And a burlesque resolution to carry off the picture by force was adopted at the dinner in London given in honor of Fallères the evening before he set off for America to attend the dedicatory exercises with which Middletown planned to install its new treasure.

For the little rustic college rose to its one great occasion. Bold in their confidence in their dead colleague's fame, the college authorities sent out invitations to all the great ones of the country. Those to whom Gridley was no more than a name on volumes one never read came because the portrait was by Fallères, and those who had no interest in the world of art came to honor the moralist whose noble clear-thinking had simplified the intimate problems of modern life. There was the usual residuum of those who came because the others did, and, also as usual, they were among the most brilliant figures in the procession which filed along, one October morning, under the old maples of Middletown campus.

It was a notable celebration. A bishop opened the exercises with prayer, a United States senator delivered the eulogy of the dead philosopher, the veil uncovering the portrait was drawn away by the mayor of one of America's largest cities, himself an ardent Gridleyite, and among those who spoke afterward were the presidents of three great universities. The professor's family was represented but scantily. He had had one brother, who had disappeared many years ago under a black cloud of ill report, and one sister who had married and gone West to live. Her two sons, middle-aged merchants from Ohio, gave the only personal note to the occasion by their somewhat

tongue-tied and embarrassed presence, for Gridley's aunt was too aged and infirm to walk with the procession from the Gymnasium, where it formed, to the Library building, where the portrait was installed.

After the inevitable photographers had made their records of the memorable gathering, the procession began to wind its many-colored way back to the Assembly Hall, where it was to lunch. Everyone was feeling relieved that the unveiling had gone off so smoothly, and cheerful at the prospect of food. The undergraduates began lustily to shout their college song, which was caught up by the holiday mood of the older ones. This cheerful tumult gradually died away in the distance, leaving the room of the portrait deserted in an echoing silence. A janitor began to remove the rows of folding chairs. The celebration was over.

Into the empty room there now limped forward a small, shabby old woman, with a crutch. "I'm his aunt, that lived with him," she explained apologetically, "and I want to see the picture."

She advanced, peering nearsightedly at the canvas. The janitor continued stacking up chairs until he was stopped by a cry from the newcomer. She was a great deal paler than when she came in. She was staring hard at the portrait and now beckoned him wildly to do the same. "Look at it! Look at it!"

Surprised, he followed the direction of her shaking hand. "Sure, it's Professor Grid to the life!" he said admiringly.

"Look at it! Look at it!" She seemed not to be able to find any other words.

After a prolonged scrutiny he turned to her with a puzzled line between his eyebrows. "Since you've spoken of it, ma'am, I will say that there's a something about the expression of the

eyes . . . and mouth, maybe . . . that ain't just the professor. It reminds me of somebody else . . . of some face I've seen . . ."

She hung on his answer, her mild, timid old face drawn like a mask of tragedy. "Who? Who?" she prompted him.

For a time he could not remember, staring at the new portrait and scratching his head. Then it came to him suddenly: "Why, sure, I ought to ha' known without thinkin', seeing the other picture as often as every time I've swep' out the president's office. And Professor Grid always looked like him some, anyhow."

The old woman leaned against the wall, her crutch trembling in her hand. Her eyes questioned him mutely.

"Why, ma'am, who but his own father, to be sure . . . the old Governor."

## II

While they had been duly sensible of the luster reflected upon them by the celebration in honor of their distinguished uncle, Professor Gridley's two nephews could scarcely have said truthfully that they enjoyed the occasion. As one of them did say to the other, the whole show was rather out of their line. Their line was wholesale hardware and, being eager to return to it, it was with a distinct feeling of relief that they waited for the train at the station. They were therefore as much displeased as surprised by the sudden appearance to them of their great-aunt, very haggard, her usual extreme timidity swept away by overmastering emotion. She clutched at the two merchants with a great sob of relief: "Stephen! Eli! Come back to the house," she cried, and before they could stop her was hobbling away. They hurried after her, divided between the fear of losing their train and the hope that some inheritance from their uncle had been found. They were not

mercenary men, but they felt a not unnatural disappointment that Professor Gridley had left not a penny, not even to his aunt, his one intimate.

They overtook her, scuttling along like some frightened and wounded little animal. "What's the matter, Aunt Amelia?" they asked shortly. "We've got to catch this train."

She faced them. "You can't go now. You've got to make them take that picture away."

"Away!" Their blankness was stupefaction.

She raged at them, the timid, harmless little thing, like a creature distraught. "Didn't you see it? Didn't you *see* it?"

Stephen answered: "Well, no, not to have a good square look at it. The man in front of me kept getting in the way."

Eli admitted: "If you mean you don't see anything in it to make all this hurrah about, I'm with you. It don't look half finished. I don't like that slap-dash style."

She was in a frenzy at their denseness. "Who did it look like?" she challenged them.

"Why, like Uncle Grid, of course. Who else?"

"Yes, yes," she cried; "who else? Who else?"

They looked at each other, afraid that she was crazed, and spoke more gently: "Why, I don't know, I'm sure, who else. Like Grandfather Gridley, of course; but then Uncle Grid always did look like his father."

At this she quite definitely put it out of their power to leave her by fainting away.

They carried her home and laid her on her own bed, where one of them stayed to attend her while the other went back to rescue their deserted baggage. As the door closed behind him the old woman came to herself. "Oh, Stephen," she moaned, "I wish it had killed me, the way it did your uncle."



"What *is* the matter?" asked her great-nephew wonderingly. "What do you think killed him?"

"That awful, awful picture! I know it now as plain as if I'd been there. He hadn't seen it all the time he was sitting for it, though he'd already put in his will that he wanted the college to have it —" she turned on the merchant with a sudden fury: "How *dare* you say those are your uncle's eyes!"

He put his hand soothingly on hers. "Now, now, Aunt 'Melia, maybe the expression isn't just right, but the color is *fine* . . . just that jet-black his were . . . and the artist has got in exact that funny stiff way uncle's hair stood up over his forehead."

The old woman fixed outraged eyes upon him. "Color!" she said. "And hair! Oh, Lord, help me!"

She sat up on the bed, clutching her nephew's hand, and began to talk rapidly. When, a half-hour later, the other brother returned, neither of them heard him enter the house. It was only when he called at the foot of the stairs that they both started and Stephen ran down to join him.

"You'll see the president . . . you'll fix it?" the old woman cried after him.

"I'll see, Aunt 'Melia," he answered pacifyingly, as he drew his brother out of doors. He looked quite pale and moved, and drew a long breath before he could begin. "Aunt Amelia's been telling me a lot of things I never knew, Eli. It seems that . . . say, did you ever hear that Grandfather Gridley, the Governor, was such a bad lot?"

"Why, mother never said much about her father one way or the other, but I always sort of guessed he wasn't all he might have been from her never bringing us on to visit here until after he died. She used to look queer, too, when folks congratulated her on having such a famous man for father. All the big poli-

ticians of his day thought a lot of him. He *was* as smart as chain-lightning!"

"He was a disreputable old scalawag!" cried his other grandson. "Some of the things Aunt Amelia has been telling me make me never want to come back to this part of the country again. Do you know why Uncle Grid lived so poor and scrimped and yet left no money? He'd been taking care of a whole family grandfather had beside ours; and paying back some people grandfather did out of a lot of money on a timber deal fifty years ago; and making it up to a little village in the backwoods that grandfather persuaded to bond itself for a railroad that he knew wouldn't go near it."

The two men stared at each other an instant, reviewing in a new light the life that had just closed. "That's why he never married," said Eli finally.

"No, that's what I said, but Aunt Amelia just went wild when I did. She said . . . gee!" he passed his hand over his eyes with a gesture of mental confusion. "Ain't it strange what can go on under your eyes and you never know it? Why, she says Uncle Grid was just like his father."

The words were not out of his mouth before the other's face of horror made him aware of his mistake. "No! No! Not that! Heavens, no! I mean . . . made like him . . . *wanted* to be that kind, 'specially drink . . ." His tongue, unused to phrasing abstractions, stumbled and tripped in his haste to correct the other's impression. "You know how much Uncle Grid used to look like grandfather . . . the same black hair and broad face and thick red lips and a kind of knob on the end of his nose? Well, it seems he had his father's insides, too . . . *but his mother's conscience!* I guess, from what Aunt Amelia says, that the combination made life about as near Tophet for him . . . ! She's the only one to know anything about it, because she's

lived with him always, you know, took him when grandmother died and he was a child. She says when he was younger he was like a man fighting a wild beast . . . he didn't dare let up or rest. Some days he wouldn't stop working at his desk all day long, not even to eat, and then he'd grab up a piece of bread and go off for a long tearing tramp that'd last 'most all night. You know what a tremendous physique all the Gridley men have had. Well, Uncle Grid turned into work all the energy the rest of them spent in deviltry. Aunt Amelia said he'd go on like that day after day for a month, and then he'd bring out one of those essays folks are so crazy about. She said she never could bear to *look* at his books . . . seemed to her they were written in his blood. She told him so once and he said it was the only thing to do with blood like his."

He was silent, while his listener made a clucking noise of astonishment. "My! My! I'd have said that there never was anybody more different from grandfather than uncle. Why, as he got on in years he didn't even look like him any more."

This reference gave Stephen a start. "Oh, yes, that's what all this came out for. Aunt Amelia is just wild about this portrait. It's just a notion of hers, of course, but after what she told me I could see, easy, how the idea would come to her. It looks this way, she says, as though Uncle Grid inherited his father's physical make-up complete, and spent all his life fighting it . . . and won out! And here's this picture making him look the way he would if he'd been the worst old . . . as if he'd been like the Governor. She says she feels as though she was the only one to defend uncle . . . as if it could make any difference to him! I guess the poor old lady is a little touched. Likely it's harder for her, losing uncle, than we realized. She just about worshipped him. Queer business, anyhow, wasn't it? Who'd ha' thought he was like that?"

He had talked his unwonted emotion quite out, and now looked at his brother with his usual matter-of-fact eye. "Did you tell the station agent to hold the trunk?"

The other, who was the younger, looked a little abashed. "Well, no; I found the train was so late I thought maybe we could . . . you know there's that business to-morrow . . .!"

His senior relieved him of embarrassment. "That's a good idea. Sure we can. There's nothing we could do if we stayed. It's just a notion of Aunt 'Melia's, anyhow. I agree with her that it don't look so awfully like Uncle Grid, but, then, oil-portraits are never any good. Give me a photograph!"

"It's out of our line, anyhow," agreed the younger, looking at his watch.

### III

The president of Middletown College had been as much relieved as pleased by the success of the rather pretentious celebration he had planned. His annoyance was correspondingly keen at the disturbing appearance, in the afternoon reception before the new portrait, of the late professor's aunt, "an entirely insignificant old country woman," he hastily assured M. Fallères after she had been half forced, half persuaded to retire, "whose criticisms were as negligible as her personality."

The tall, Jove-like artist concealed a smile by stroking his great brown beard. When it came to insignificant country people, he told himself, it was hard to draw lines in his present company. He was wondering whether he might not escape by an earlier train.

To the president's remark he answered that no portrait-painter escaped unreasonable relatives of his sitters. "It is an axiom with our guild," he went on, not, perhaps, averse to

giving his provincial hosts a new sensation, "that the family is never satisfied, and also that the family has no rights. A sitter is a subject only, like a slice of fish. The only question is how it's done. What difference does it make a century from now, if the likeness is good? It's a work of art or it's nothing." He announced this principle with a regal absence of explanation and turned away; but his thesis was taken up by another guest, a New York art-critic.

"By Jove, it's inconceivable, the ignorance of art in America!" he told the little group before the portrait. "You find everyone so incurably personal in his point of view . . . always objecting to a masterpiece because the watch-chain isn't the kind usually worn by the dear departed."

Someone else chimed in. "Yes, it's incredible that anyone, even an old village granny, should be able to look at that canvas and not be struck speechless by its quality."

The critic was in Middletown to report on the portrait and he now began marshaling his adjectives for that purpose. "I never saw such use of pigment in my life . . . it makes the Whistler 'Carlyle' look like burnt-out ashes . . . the luminous richness of the blacks in the academic gown, the masterly generalization in the treatment of the hair, the placing of those great talons of hands on the canvas carrying out the vigorous lines of the composition, and the unforgettable felicity of those brutally red lips as the one ringing note of color. As for life-likeness, what's the old dame talking about! I never saw such eyes! Not a hint of meretricious emphasis on their luster and yet they fairly flame."

The conversation spread to a less technical discussion as the group was joined by the professor of rhetoric, an ambitious young man with an insatiable craving for sophistication, who felt himself for once entirely in his element in the crowd of



celebrities. "It's incredibly good luck that our little two-for-a-cent college should have so fine a thing," he said knowingly. "I've been wondering how such an old skinflint as Gridley ever got the money loose to have his portrait done by —"

A laugh went around the group at the idea. "It was Mackintosh, the sugar king, who put up for it. He's a great Gridleyite, and persuaded him to sit."

"*Persuade* a man to sit to Fallères!" The rhetoric professor was outraged at the idea.

"Yes, so they say. The professor was dead against it from the first. Fallères himself had to beg him to sit. Fallères said he felt a real inspiration at the sight of the old fellow . . . knew he could make a good thing out of him. He *was* a good subject!"

The little group turned and stared appraisingly at the portrait hanging so close to them that it seemed another living being in their midst. The rhetoric professor was asked what kind of a man the philosopher had been personally, and answered briskly: "Oh, nobody knew him personally . . . the silent old codger. He was a dry-as-dust, bloodless, secular monk —"

He was interrupted by a laugh from the art-critic, whose eyes were still on the portrait.

"Excuse me for my cynical mirth," he said, "but I must say he doesn't look it. I was prepared for any characterization but that. He looks like a powerful son of the Renaissance, who might have lived in that one little vacation of the soul after medievalism stopped hag-riding us, and before the modern conscience got its claws on us. And you say he was a blue-nosed Puritan!"

The professor of rhetoric looked an uneasy fear that he was being ridiculed. "I only repeated the village notion of him,"

he said airily. "He may have been anything. All I know is that he was as secretive as a clam, and about as interesting personally."

"Look at the picture," said the critic, still laughing; "you'll know all about him!"

The professor of rhetoric nodded. "You're right, he doesn't look much like my character of him. I never seem to have had a good, square look at him before. I've heard several people say the same thing, that they seemed to understand him better from the portrait than from his living face. There was something about his eyes that kept you from thinking of anything but what he was saying."

The critic agreed. "The eyes are wonderful . . . ruthless in their power . . . fires of hell." He laughed a deprecating apology for his overemphatic metaphor and suggested: "It's possible that there was more to the professorial life than met the eye. Had he a wife?"

"No; it was always a joke in the village that he would never look at a woman."

The critic glanced up at the smoldering eyes of the portrait and smiled. "I've heard of that kind of a man before," he said. "Never known to drink, either, I suppose?"

"Cold-water teetotaler," laughed the professor, catching the spirit of the occasion.

"Look at the color in that nose!" said the critic. "I fancy that the ascetic moralist —"

A very young man, an undergraduate who had been introduced as the junior usher, nodded his head. "Yep, a lot of us fellows always thought old Grid a little too good to be true."

An older man with the flexible mouth of a politician now ventured a contribution to a conversation no longer bafflingly esthetic: "His father, old Governor Gridley, wasn't he . . .

Well, I guess you're right about the son. No halos were handed down in *that* family!"

The laugh which followed this speech was stopped by the approach of Fallères, his commanding presence dwarfing the president beside him. He was listening with a good-natured contempt to the apparently rather anxious murmurs of the latter.

"Of course I know, Mr. Fallères, it is a great deal to ask, but she is so insistent . . . she won't go away and continues to make the most distressing spectacle of herself . . . and several people, since she has said so much about it, are saying that the expression is not that of the late professor. Much against my will I promised to speak to you —"

His mortified uneasiness was so great that the artist gave him a rescuing hand. "Well, Mr. President, what can I do in the matter? The man is dead. I cannot paint him over again, and if I could I would only do again as I did this time, choose that aspect which my judgment told me would make the best portrait. If his habitual vacant expression was not so interesting as another not so permanent a habit of his face . . . why, the poor artist must be allowed some choice. I did not know I was to please his grandmother, and not posterity."

"His aunt," corrected the president automatically.

The portrait-painter accepted the correction with his tolerant smile. "His aunt," he repeated. "The difference is considerable. May I ask what it was you promised her?"

The president summoned his courage. It was easy to gather from his infinitely reluctant insistence how painful and compelling had been the scene which forced him to action. "She wants you to change it . . . to make the expression of the —"

For the first time the artist's equanimity was shaken. He took a step backward. "Change it!" he said, and although

his voice was low the casual chat all over the room stopped short as though a pistol had been fired.

"It's not *my* idea!" The president confounded himself in self-exoneration. "I merely promised, to pacify her, to ask you if you could not do some little thing that would —"

The critic assumed the rôle of conciliator. "My dear sir, I don't believe you quite understand what you are asking. It's as though you asked a priest to make just a little change in the church service and leave out the 'not' in the Commandments."

"I only wish to know Mr. Fallères's attitude," said the president stiffly, a little nettled by the other's note of condescension. "I presume he will be willing to take the responsibility of it himself and explain to the professor's aunt that *I* have done —"

The artist had recovered from his lapse from Olympian calm and now nodded, smiling: "Dear me, yes, Mr. President, I'm used to irate relatives."

The president hastened away and the knot of talkers in other parts of the room, who had been looking with expectant curiosity at the group before the portrait, resumed their loud-toned chatter. When their attention was next drawn in the same direction, it was by a shaky old treble, breaking, quavering with weakness. A small, shabby old woman, leaning on a crutch, stood looking up imploringly at the tall painter.

"My dear madam," he broke in on her with a kindly impatience, "all that you say about Professor Gridley is much to his credit, but what has it to do with me?"

"You painted his portrait," she said with a simplicity that was like stupidity. "And I am his aunt. You made a picture of a bad man. I know he was a good man."

"I painted what I saw," sighed the artist wearily. He looked furtively at his watch.

The old woman seemed dazed by the extremity of her emotion. She looked about her silently, keeping her eyes averted from the portrait that stood so vividly like a living man beside her. "I don't know what to do!" she murmured with a little moan. "I can't *bear* it to have it stay here — people forget so. Everybody'll think that Gridley looked like *that*! And there isn't anybody but me. He never had anybody but me."

The critic tried to clear the air by a roundly declaratory statement of principles. "You'll pardon my bluntness, madam; but you must remember that none but the members of Professor Gridley's family are concerned in the exact details of his appearance. Fifty years from now nobody will remember how he looked, one way or the other. The world is only concerned with portraits as works of art."

She followed his reasoning with a strained and docile attention and now spoke eagerly as though struck by an unexpected hope: "If that's all, why put his name to it? Just hang it up, and call it anything."

She shrank together timidly and her eyes reddened at the laughter which greeted this naïve suggestion.

Fallères looked annoyed and called his defender off. "Oh, never mind explaining me," he said, snapping his watch shut. "You'll never get the rights of it through anybody's head who hasn't himself sweat blood over a composition only to be told that the other side of the sitter's profile is usually considered the prettier. After all, we have the last word, since the sitter dies and the portrait lives."

The old woman started and looked at him attentively.

"Yes," said the critic, laughing, "immortality's not a bad balm for pin-pricks."

The old woman turned very pale and for the first time looked again at the portrait. An electric thrill seemed to pass through



her as her eyes encountered the bold, evil ones fixed on her. She stood erect with a rigid face, and "Immortality!" she said, under her breath.

Fallères moved away to make his adieux to the president, and the little group of his satellites straggled after him to the other end of the room. For a moment there was no one near the old woman to see the crutch furiously upraised, hammer-like, or to stop her sudden passionate rush upon the picture.

At the sound of cracking cloth, they turned back, horrified. They saw her, with an insane violence, thrust her hands into the gaping hole that had been the portrait's face and, tearing the canvas from end to end, fall upon the shreds with teeth and talon.

All but Fallères flung themselves toward her, dragging her away. With a movement as instinctive he rushed for the picture, and it was to him, as he stood aghast before the ruined canvas, that the old woman's shrill treble was directed, above the loud shocked voices of those about her: "There ain't anything immortal but souls!" she cried.

## PAUL'S CASE<sup>1</sup>

By WILLA CATHER

IT was Paul's afternoon to appear before the faculty of the Pittsburgh High School to account for his various misdemeanours. He had been suspended a week ago, and his father had called at the Principal's office and confessed his perplexity about his son. Paul entered the faculty room suave and smiling. His clothes were a trifle out-grown, and the tan velvet on the collar of his open overcoat was frayed and worn; but for all that there was something of the dandy about him, and he wore an opal pin in his neatly knotted black four-in-hand, and a red carnation in his button-hole. This latter adornment the faculty somehow felt was not properly significant of the contrite spirit befitting a boy under the ban of suspension.

Paul was tall for his age and very thin, with high, cramped shoulders and a narrow chest. His eyes were remarkable for a certain hysterical brilliancy, and he continually used them in a conscious, theatrical sort of way, peculiarly offensive in a boy. The pupils were abnormally large, as though he were addicted to belladonna, but there was a glassy glitter about them which that drug does not produce.

When questioned by the Principal as to why he was there, Paul stated, politely enough, that he wanted to come back to school. This was a lie, but Paul was quite accustomed to lying; found it, indeed, indispensable for overcoming friction. His teachers were asked to state their respective charges against

<sup>1</sup> From *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, by Willa Cather. Reprinted by permission of, and by special arrangement with, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. authorized publishers.

him, which they did with such a rancour and aggrievedness as evinced that this was not a usual case. Disorder and impertinence were among the offences named, yet each of his instructors felt that it was scarcely possible to put into words the real cause of the trouble, which lay in a sort of hysterically defiant manner of the boy's; in the contempt which they all knew he felt for them, and which he seemingly made not the least effort to conceal. Once, when he had been making a synopsis of a paragraph at the blackboard, his English teacher had stepped to his side and attempted to guide his hand. Paul had started back with a shudder and thrust his hands violently behind him. The astonished woman could scarcely have been more hurt and embarrassed had he struck at her. The insult was so involuntary and definitely personal as to be unforgettable. In one way and another, he had made all his teachers, men and women alike, conscious of the same feeling of physical aversion. In one class he habitually sat with his hand shading his eyes; in another he always looked out of the window during the recitation; in another he made a running commentary on the lecture, with humorous intent.

His teachers felt this afternoon that his whole attitude was symbolized by his shrug and his flippantly red carnation flower, and they fell upon him without mercy, his English teacher leading the pack. He stood through it smiling, his pale lips parted over his white teeth. (His lips were continually twitching, and he had a habit of raising his eyebrows that was contemptuous and irritating to the last degree.) Older boys than Paul had broken down and shed tears under that ordeal, but his set smile did not once desert him, and his only sign of discomfort was the nervous trembling of the fingers that toyed with the buttons of his overcoat, and an occasional jerking of the other hand which held his hat. Paul was always smiling,

always glancing about him, seeming to feel that people might be watching him and trying to detect something. This conscious expression, since it was as far as possible from boyish mirthfulness, was usually attributed to insolence or "smartness."

As the inquisition proceeded, one of his instructors repeated an impertinent remark of the boy's, and the Principal asked him whether he thought that a courteous speech to make to a woman. Paul shrugged his shoulders slightly and his eyebrows twitched.

"I don't know," he replied. "I didn't mean to be polite or impolite, either. I guess it's a sort of way I have of saying things regardless."

The Principal asked him whether he didn't think that a way it would be well to get rid of. Paul grinned and said he guessed so. When he was told that he could go, he bowed gracefully and went out. His bow was like a repetition of the scandalous red carnation.

His teachers were in despair, and his drawing master voiced the feeling of them all when he declared there was something about the boy which none of them understood. He added: "I don't really believe that smile of his comes altogether from insolence; there's something sort of haunted about it. The boy is not strong, for one thing. There is something wrong about the fellow."

The drawing master had come to realize that, in looking at Paul, one saw only his white teeth and the forced animation of his eyes. One warm afternoon the boy had gone to sleep at his drawing-board, and his master had noted with amazement what a white, blue-veined face it was; drawn and wrinkled like an old man's about the eyes, the lips twitching even in his sleep.

His teachers left the building dissatisfied and unhappy; humiliated to have felt so vindictive toward a mere boy, to have uttered this feeling in cutting terms, and to have set each other on, as it were, in the gruesome game of intemperate reproach. One of them remembered having seen a miserable street cat set at bay by a ring of tormentors.

As for Paul, he ran down the hill whistling the Soldiers' Chorus from *Faust*, looking wildly behind him now and then to see whether some of his teachers were not there to witness his light-heartedness. As it was now late in the afternoon and Paul was on duty that evening as usher at Carnegie Hall, he decided that he would not go home to supper.

When he reached the concert hall the doors were not yet open. It was chilly outside, and he decided to go up into the picture gallery — always deserted at this hour — where there were some of Raffelli's gay studies of Paris streets and an airy blue Venetian scene or two that always exhilarated him. He was delighted to find no one in the gallery but the old guard, who sat in the corner, a newspaper on his knee, a black patch over one eye and the other closed. Paul possessed himself of the place and walked confidently up and down, whistling under his breath. After a while he sat down before a blue Rico and lost himself. When he bethought him to look at his watch, it was after seven o'clock, and he rose with a start and ran downstairs, making a face at Augustus Cæsar, peering out from the cast-room, and an evil gesture at the Venus of Milo as he passed her on the stairway.

When Paul reached the ushers' dressing-room half-a-dozen boys were there already, and he began excitedly to tumble into his uniform. It was one of the few that at all approached fitting, and Paul thought it very becoming — though he knew the tight, straight coat accentuated his narrow chest, about



which he was exceedingly sensitive. He was always excited while he dressed, twanging all over to the tuning of the strings and the preliminary flourishes of the horns in the music-room; but tonight he seemed quite beside himself, and he teased and plagued the boys until, telling him that he was crazy, they put him down on the floor and sat on him.

Somewhat calmed by his suppression, Paul dashed out to the front of the house to seat the early comers. He was a model usher. Gracious and smiling he ran up and down the aisles. Nothing was too much trouble for him; he carried messages and brought programs as though it were his greatest pleasure in life, and all the people in his section thought him a charming boy, feeling that he remembered and admired them. As the house filled, he grew more and more vivacious and animated, and the colour came to his cheeks and lips. It was very much as though this were a great reception and Paul were the host. Just as the musicians came out to take their places, his English teacher arrived with checks for the seats which a prominent manufacturer had taken for the season. She betrayed some embarrassment when she handed Paul the tickets, and a *hauteur* which subsequently made her feel very foolish. Paul was startled for a moment, and had the feeling of wanting to put her out; what business had she here among all these fine people and gay colours? He looked her over and decided that she was not appropriately dressed and must be a fool to sit downstairs in such togs. The tickets had probably been sent her out of kindness, he reflected, as he put down a seat for her, and she had about as much right to sit there as he had.

When the symphony began Paul sank into one of the rear seats with a long sigh of relief, and lost himself as he had done before the Rico. It was not that symphonies, as such, meant anything in particular to Paul, but the first sigh of the instru-

ments seemed to free some hilarious spirit within him; something that struggled there like the Genius in the bottle found by the Arab fisherman. He felt a sudden zest of life; the lights danced before his eyes and the concert hall blazed into unimaginable splendour. When the soprano soloist came on, Paul forgot even the nastiness of his teacher's being there, and gave himself up to the peculiar intoxication such personages always had for him. The soloist chanced to be a German woman, by no means in her first youth, and the mother of many children; but she wore a satin gown and a tiara, and she had that indefinable air of achievement, that world-shine upon her, which always blinded Paul to any possible defects.

After a concert was over, Paul was often irritable and wretched until he got to sleep, — and tonight he was even more than usually restless. He had the feeling of not being able to let down; of its being impossible to give up this delicious excitement which was the only thing that could be called living at all. During the last number he withdrew and, after hastily changing his clothes in the dressing-room, slipped out to the side door where the singer's carriage stood. Here he began pacing rapidly up and down the walk, waiting to see her come out.

Over yonder the Schenley, in its vacant stretch, loomed big and square through the fine rain, the windows of its twelve stories glowing like those of a lighted cardboard house under a Christmas tree. All the actors and singers of any importance stayed there when they were in the city, and a number of the big manufacturers of the place lived there in the winter. Paul had often hung about the hotel, watching the people go in and out, longing to enter and leave school-masters and dull care behind him forever.

At last the singer came out, accompanied by the conductor, who helped her into her carriage and closed the door with a cordial *auf wiedersehen*, -- which set Paul to wondering whether she were not an old sweetheart of his. Paul followed the carriage over to the hotel, walking so rapidly as not to be far from the entrance when the singer alighted and disappeared behind the swinging glass doors which were opened by a negro in a tall hat and a long coat. In the moment that the door was ajar, it seemed to Paul that he, too, entered. He seemed to feel himself go after her up the steps, into the warm, lighted building, into an exotic, a tropical world of shiny, glistening surfaces and basking ease. He reflected upon the mysterious dishes that were brought into the dining-room, the green bottles in buckets of ice, as he had seen them in the supper party pictures of the Sunday supplement. A quick gust of wind brought the rain down with sudden vehemence, and Paul was startled to find that he was still outside in the slush of the gravel driveway; that his boots were letting in the water and his scanty overcoat was clinging wet about him; that the lights in front of the concert hall were out, and that the rain was driving in sheets between him and the orange glow of the windows above him. There it was, what he wanted -- tangibly before him like the fairy world of a Christmas pantomime; as the rain beat in his face, Paul wondered whether he were destined always to shiver in the black night outside, looking up at it.

He turned and walked reluctantly toward the car tracks. The end had to come sometime; his father in his night-clothes at the top of the stairs, explanations that did not explain, hastily improvised fictions that were forever tripping him up, his upstairs room and its horrible yellow wall-paper, the creaking bureau with the greasy plush collar-box, and over his painted

wooden bed the pictures of George Washington and John Calvin, and the framed motto, "Feed my Lambs," which had been worked in red worsted by his mother, whom Paul could not remember.

Half an hour later Paul alighted from the Negley Avenue car and went slowly down one of the side streets off the main thoroughfare. It was a highly respectable street, where all the houses were exactly alike, and where business men of moderate means begot and reared large families of children, all of whom went to Sabbath-school and learned the shorter catechism, and were interested in arithmetic; all of whom were as exactly alike as their homes, and of a piece with the monotony in which they lived. Paul never went up Cordelia Street without a shudder of loathing. His home was next the house of the Cumberland minister. He approached it tonight with the nerveless sense of defeat, the hopeless feeling of sinking back forever into ugliness and commonness that he had always had when he came home. The moment he turned into Cordelia Street he felt the waters close above his head. After each of these orgies of living, he experienced all the physical depression which follows a debauch; the loathing of respectable beds, of common food, of a house permeated by kitchen odours; a shuddering repulsion for the flavourless, colourless mass of every-day existence; a morbid desire for cool things and soft lights and fresh flowers.

The nearer he approached the house, the more absolutely unequal Paul felt to the sight of it all; his ugly sleeping chamber; the cold bath-room with the grimy zinc tub, the cracked mirror, the dripping spigots; his father, at the top of the stairs, his hairy legs sticking out from his night-shirt, his feet thrust into carpet slippers. He was so much later than usual that there would certainly be inquiries and reproaches. Paul

stopped short before the door. He felt that he could not be accosted by his father tonight; that he could not toss again on that miserable bed. He would not go in. He would tell his father that he had no car-fare, and it was raining so hard he had gone home with one of the boys and stayed all night.

Meanwhile, he was wet and cold. He went around to the back of the house and tried one of the basement windows, found it open, raised it cautiously, and scrambled down the cellar wall to the floor. There he stood, holding his breath, terrified by the noise he had made; but the floor above him was silent, and there was no creak on the stairs. He found a soap-box, and carried it over to the soft ring of light that streamed from the furnace door, and sat down. He was horribly afraid of rats, so he did not try to sleep, but sat looking distrustfully at the dark, still terrified lest he might have awakened his father. In such reactions, after one of the experiences which made days and nights out of the dreary blanks of the calendar, when his senses were deadened, Paul's head was always singularly clear. Suppose his father had heard him getting in at the window and had come down and shot him for a burglar? Then, again, suppose his father had come down, pistol in hand, and he had cried out in time to save himself, and his father had been horrified to think how nearly he had killed him? Then, again, suppose a day should come when his father would remember that night, and wish there had been no warning cry to stay his hand? With this last supposition Paul entertained himself until daybreak.

The following Sunday was fine; the sodden November chill was broken by the last flash of autumnal summer. In the morning Paul had to go to church and Sabbath-school, as always. On seasonable Sunday afternoons the burghers of Cordelia Street usually sat out on their front "stoops," and



talked to their neighbours on the next stoop, or called to those across the street in neighbourly fashion. The men sat placidly on gay cushions placed upon the steps that led down to the sidewalk, while the women, in their Sunday "waists," sat in rockers on the cramped porches, pretending to be greatly at their ease. The children played in the streets; there were so many of them that the place resembled the recreation grounds of a kindergarten. The men on the steps — all in their shirt sleeves, their vests unbuttoned — sat with their legs well apart, their stomachs comfortably protruding, and talked of the prices of things, or told anecdotes of the sagacity of their various chiefs and overlords. They occasionally looked over the multitude of squabbling children, listened affectionately to their high-pitched, nasal voices, smiling to see their own proclivities reproduced in their offspring, and interspersed their legends of the iron kings with remarks about their sons' progress at school, their grades in arithmetic, and the amounts they had saved in their toy banks.

On this last Sunday of November, Paul sat all the afternoon on the lowest step of his "stoop," staring into the street, while his sisters, in their rockers, were talking to the minister's daughters next door about how many shirt-waists they had made in the last week, and how many waffles some one had eaten at the last church supper. When the weather was warm, and his father was in a particularly jovial frame of mind, the girls made lemonade, which was always brought out in a red-glass pitcher, ornamented with forget-me-nots in blue enamel. This the girls thought very fine, and the neighbours joked about the suspicious colour of the pitcher.

Today Paul's father, on the top step, was talking to a young man who shifted a restless baby from knee to knee. He happened to be the young man who was daily held up to Paul as

a model, and after whom it was his father's dearest hope that he would pattern. This young man was of a ruddy complexion, with a compressed, red mouth, and faded, near-sighted eyes, over which he wore thick spectacles, with gold bows that curved about his ears. He was clerk to one of the magnates of a great steel corporation, and was looked upon in Cordelia Street as a young man with a future. There was a story that, some five years ago — he was now barely twenty-six — he had been a trifle 'Dissipated,' but in order to curb his appetites and save the loss of time and strength that a sowing of wild oats might have entailed, he had taken his chief's advice, oft reiterated to his employes, and at twenty-one had married the first woman whom he could persuade to share his fortunes. She happened to be an angular school-mistress, much older than he, who also wore thick glasses, and who had now borne him four children, all near-sighted, like herself.

The young man was relating how his chief, now cruising in the Mediterranean, kept in touch with all the details of the business, arranging his office hours on his yacht just as though he were at home, and "knocking off work enough to keep two stenographers busy." His father told, in turn, the plan his corporation was considering, of putting in an electric railway plant at Cairo. Paul snapped his teeth; he had an awful apprehension that they might spoil it all before he got there. Yet he rather liked to hear these legends of the iron kings, that were told and retold on Sundays and holidays; these stories of palaces in Venice, yachts on the Mediterranean, and high play at Monte Carlo appealed to his fancy, and he was interested in the triumphs of cash boys who had become famous, though he had no mind for the cash-boy stage.

After supper was over, and he had helped to dry the dishes, Paul nervously asked his father whether he could go to

George's to get some help in his geometry, and still more nervously asked for car-fare. This latter request he had to repeat, as his father, on principle, did not like to hear requests for money, whether much or little. He asked Paul whether he could not go to some boy who lived nearer, and told him that he ought not to leave his school work until Sunday; but he gave him the dime. He was not a poor man, but he had a worthy ambition to come up in the world. His only reason for allowing Paul to usher was that he thought a boy ought to be earning a little.

Paul bounded upstairs, scrubbed the greasy odour of the dish-water from his hands with the ill-smelling soap he hated, and then shook over his fingers a few drops of violet water from the bottle he kept hidden in his drawer. He left the house with his geometry conspicuously under his arm, and the moment he got out of Cordelia Street and boarded a downtown car, he shook off the lethargy of two deadening days, and began to live again.

The leading juvenile of the permanent stock company which played at one of the downtown theatres was an acquaintance of Paul's, and the boy had been invited to drop in at the Sunday-night rehearsals whenever he could. For more than a year Paul had spent every available moment loitering about Charley Edwards's dressing-room. He had won a place among Edwards's following not only because the young actor, who could not afford to employ a dresser, often found him useful, but because he recognized in Paul something akin to what churchmen term "vocation."

It was at the theatre and at Carnegie Hall that Paul really lived; the rest was but a sleep and a forgetting. This was Paul's fairy tale, and it had for him all the allurements of a secret love. The moment he inhaled the gassy, painty, dusty

odour behind the scenes, he breathed like a prisoner set free, and felt within him the possibility of doing or saying splendid, brilliant things. The moment the cracked orchestra beat out the overture from *Martha*, or jerked at the serenade from *Rigoletto*, all stupid and ugly things slid from him, and his senses were deliciously, yet delicately fired.

Perhaps it was because, in Paul's world, the natural nearly always wore the guise of ugliness, that a certain element of artificiality seemed to him necessary in beauty. Perhaps it was because his experience of life elsewhere was so full of Sabbath-school picnics, petty economies, wholesome advice as to how to succeed in life, and the unescapable odours of cooking, that he found this existence so alluring, these smartly-clad men and women so attractive, that he was so moved by these starry apple orchards that bloomed perennially under the lime-light.

It would be difficult to put it strongly enough how convincingly the stage entrance of that theatre was for Paul the actual portal of Romance. Certainly none of the company ever suspected it, least of all Charley Edwards. It was very like the old stories that used to float about London of fabulously rich Jews, who had subterranean halls, with palms, and fountains, and soft lamps and richly appavelled women who never saw the disenchanting light of London day. So, in the midst of that smoke-palled city, enamoured of figures and grimy toil, Paul had his secret temple, his wishing-carpet, his bit of blue-and-white Mediterranean shore bathed in perpetual sunshine.

Several of Paul's teachers had a theory that his imagination had been perverted by garish fiction; but the truth was, he scarcely ever read at all. The books at home were not such as would either tempt or corrupt a youthful mind, and as for

reading the novels that some of his friends urged upon him — well, he got what he wanted much more quickly from music; any sort of music, from an orchestra to a barrel organ. He needed only the spark, the indescribable thrill that made his imagination master of his senses, and he could make plots and pictures enough of his own. It was equally true that he was not stage-struck — not, at any rate, in the usual acceptance of that expression. He had no desire to become an actor, any more than he had to become a musician. He felt no necessity to do any of these things; what he wanted was to see, to be in the atmosphere, float on the wave of it, to be carried out, blue league after blue league, away from everything.

After a night behind the scenes, Paul found the school-room more than ever repulsive; the hard floors and naked walls; the prosy men who never wore frock coats, or violets in their button-holes; the women with their dull gowns, shrill voices, and pitiful seriousness about prepositions that govern the dative. He could not bear to have the other pupils think, for a moment, that he took these people seriously; he must convey to them that he considered it all trivial, and was there only by way of a joke, anyway. He had autograph pictures of all the members of the stock company which he showed his classmates, telling them the most incredible stories of his familiarity with these people, of his acquaintance with the soloists who came to Carnegie Hall, his suppers with them and the flowers he sent them. When these stories lost their effect, and his audience grew listless, he would bid all the boys good-bye, announcing that he was going to travel for a while; going to Naples, to California, to Egypt. Then, next Monday, he would slip back, conscious and nervously smiling; his sister was ill, and he would have to defer his voyage until spring.

Matters went steadily worse with Paul at school. In the



itch to let his instructors know how heartily he despised them, and how thoroughly he was appreciated elsewhere, he mentioned once or twice that he had no time to fool with theorems; adding — with a twitch of the eyebrows and a touch of that nervous bravado which so perplexed them — that he was helping the people down at the stock company; they were old friends of his.

The upshot of the matter was, that the Principal went to Paul's father, and Paul was taken out of school and put to work. The manager at Carnegie Hall was told to get another usher in his stead; the doorkeeper at the theatre was warned not to admit him to the house; and Charley Edwards remorsefully promised the boy's father not to see him again.

The members of the stock company were vastly amused when some of Paul's stories reached them — especially the women. They were hard-working women, most of them supporting indolent husbands or brothers, and they laughed rather bitterly at having stirred the boy to such fervid and florid inventions. They agreed with the faculty and with his father, that Paul's was a bad case.

The east-bound train was ploughing through a January snow-storm; the dull dawn was beginning to show grey when the engine whistled a mile out of Newark. Paul started up from the seat where he had lain curled in uneasy slumber, rubbed the breath-misted window glass with his hand, and peered out. The snow was whirling in curling eddies above the white bottom lands, and the drifts lay already deep in the fields and along the fences, while here and there the long dead grass and dried weed stalks protruded black above it. Lights shone from the scattered houses, and a gang of labourers who stood beside the track waved their lanterns.

Paul had slept very little, and he felt grimy and uncomfortable. He had made the all-night journey in a day coach because he was afraid if he took a Pullman he might be seen by some Pittsburgh business man who had noticed him in Denny & Carson's office. When the whistle woke him, he clutched quickly at his breast pocket, glancing about him with an uncertain smile. But the little, clay-bespattered Italians were still sleeping, the slatternly women across the aisle were in open-mouthed oblivion, and even the crumbly, crying babies were for the nonce stilled. Paul settled back to struggle with his impatience as best he could.

When he arrived at the Jersey City Station, he hurried through his breakfast, manifestly ill at ease and keeping a sharp eye about him. After he reached the Twenty-third Street Station, he consulted a cabman, and had himself driven to a men's furnishing establishment which was just opening for the day. He spent upward of two hours there, buying with endless reconsidering and great care. His new street suit he put on in the fitting-room; the frock coat and dress clothes he had bundled into the cab with his new shirts. Then he drove to a hatter's and a shoe house. His next errand was at Tiffany's, where he selected silver-mounted brushes and a scarf-pin. He would not wait to have his silver marked, he said. Lastly, he stopped at a trunk shop on Broadway, and had his purchases packed into various travelling bags.

It was a little after one o'clock when he drove up to the Waldorf, and, after settling with the cabman, went into the office. He registered from Washington; said his mother and father had been abroad, and that he had come down to await the arrival of their steamer. He told his story plausibly and had no trouble, since he offered to pay for them in advance,

in engaging his rooms; a sleeping-room, sitting-room and bath.

Not once, but a hundred times Paul had planned this entry into New York. He had gone over every detail of it with Charley Edwards, and in his scrap book at home there were pages of description about New York hotels, cut from the Sunday papers.

When he was shown to his sitting-room on the eighth floor, he saw at a glance that everything was as it should be; there was but one detail in his mental picture that the place did not realize, so he rang for the bell boy and sent him down for flowers. He moved about nervously until the boy returned, putting away his new linen and fingering it delightedly as he did so. When the flowers came, he put them hastily into water, and then tumbled into a hot bath. Presently he came out of his white bath-room, resplendent in his new silk underwear, and playing with the tassels of his red robe. The snow was whirling so fiercely outside his windows that he could scarcely see across the street; but within, the air was deliciously soft and fragrant. He put the violets and jonquils on the tabouret beside the couch, and threw himself down with a long sigh, covering himself with a Roman blanket. He was thoroughly tired; he had been in such haste, he had stood up to such a strain, covered so much ground in the last twenty-four hours, that he wanted to think how it had all come about. Lulled by the sound of the wind, the warm air, and the cool fragrance of the flowers, he sank into deep, drowsy retrospection.

It had been wonderfully simple; when they had shut him out of the theatre and concert hall, when they had taken away his bone, the whole thing was virtually determined. The rest was a mere matter of opportunity. The only thing that at all surprised him was his own courage—for he realized well enough that he had always been tormented by fear, a sort of

apprehensive dread that, of late years, as the meshes of the lies he had told closed about him, had been pulling the muscles of his body tighter and tighter. Until now, he could not remember a time when he had not been dreading something. Even when he was a little boy, it was always there — behind him, or before, or on either side. There had always been the shadowed corner, the dark place into which he dared not look, but from which something seemed always to be watching him — and Paul had done things that were not pretty to watch, he knew.

But now he had a curious sense of relief, as though he had at last thrown down the gauntlet to the thing in the corner.

Yet it was but a day since he had been sulking in the traces; but yesterday afternoon that he had been sent to the bank with Denny & Carson's deposit as usual — but this time he was instructed to leave the book to be balanced. There was above two thousand dollars in checks, and nearly a thousand in the bank notes which he had taken from the book and quietly transferred to his pocket. At the bank he had made out a new deposit slip. His nerves had been steady enough to permit of his returning to the office, where he had finished his work and asked for a full day's holiday tomorrow, Saturday, giving a perfectly reasonable pretext. The bank book, he knew, would not be returned before Monday or Tuesday, and his father would be out of town for the next week. From the time he slipped the bank notes into his pocket until he boarded the night train for New York, he had not known a moment's hesitation.

How astonishingly easy it had all been; here he was, the thing done; and this time there would be no awakening, no figure at the top of the stairs. He watched the snow flakes whirling by his window until he fell asleep.

When he awoke, it was four o'clock in the afternoon. He

bounded up with a start; one of his precious days gone already! He spent nearly an hour in dressing, watching every stage of his toilet carefully in the mirror. Everything was quite perfect; he was exactly the kind of boy he had always wanted to be.

When he went downstairs, Paul took a carriage and drove up Fifth Avenue toward the Park. The snow had somewhat abated; carriages and tradesmen's wagons were hurrying soundlessly to and fro in the winter twilight; boys in woollen mufflers were shovelling off the doorsteps; the avenue stages made fine spots of colour against the white street. Here and there on the corners were stands, with whole flower gardens blooming behind glass windows, against which the snow flakes stuck and melted; violets, roses, carnations, lilies of the valley — somehow vastly more lovely and alluring that they blossomed thus unnaturally in the snow. The Park itself was a wonderful stage winterpiece.

When he returned, the pause of the twilight had ceased, and the tune of the streets had changed. The snow was falling faster, lights streamed from the hotels that reared their many stories fearlessly up into the storm, defying the raging Atlantic winds. A long, black stream of carriages poured down the avenue, intersected here and there by other streams, tending horizontally. There were a score of cabs about the entrance of his hotel, and his driver had to wait. Boys in livery were running in and out of the awning stretched across the sidewalk, up and down the red velvet carpet laid from the door to the street. Above, about, within it all, was the rumble and roar, the hurry and toss of thousands of human beings as hot for pleasure as himself, and on every side of him towered the glaring affirmation of the omnipotence of wealth.

The boy set his teeth and drew his shoulders together in a



spasm of realization; the plot of all dramas, the text of all romances, the nerve-stuff of all sensations was whirling about him like the snow flakes. He burnt like a faggot in a tempest.

When Paul came down to dinner, the music of the orchestra floated up the elevator shaft to greet him. As he stepped into the thronged corridor, he sank back into one of the chairs against the wall to get his breath. The lights, the chatter, the perfumes, the bewildering medley of colour — he had, for a moment, the feeling of not being able to stand it. But only for a moment; these were his own people, he told himself. He went slowly about the corridors, through the writing-rooms, smoking-rooms, reception-rooms, as though he were exploring the chambers of an enchanted palace, built and peopled for him alone.

When he reached the dining-room he sat down at a table near a window. The flowers, the white linen, the many-coloured wine glasses, the gay toilettes of the women, the low popping of corks, the undulating repetitions of the *Blue Danube* from the orchestra, all flooded Paul's dream with bewildering radiance. When the roseate tinge of his champagne was added — that cold, precious bubbling stuff that creamed and foamed in his glass — Paul wondered that there were honest men in the world at all. This was what all the world was fighting for, he reflected; this was what all the struggle was about. He doubted the reality of his past. Had he ever known a place called Cordelia Street, a place where fagged looking business men boarded the early car? Mere rivets in a machine they seemed to Paul, — sickening men, with combings of children's hair always hanging to their coats, and the smell of cooking in their clothes. Cordelia Street — Ah, that belonged to another time and country! Had he not always been thus, had he not sat here night after night, from as far back as he could remem-

ber, looking pensively over just such shimmering textures, and slowly twirling the stem of a glass like this one between his thumb and middle finger? He rather thought he had.

He was not in the least abashed or lonely. He had no especial desire to meet or to know any of these people; all he demanded was the right to look on and conjecture, to watch the pageant. The mere stage properties were all he contended for. Nor was he lonely later in the evening, in his loge at the Opera. He was entirely rid of his nervous misgivings, of his forced aggressiveness, of the imperative desire to show himself different from his surroundings. He felt now that his surroundings explained him. Nobody questioned his purple; he had only to wear it passively. He had only to glance down at his dress coat to reassure himself that here it would be impossible for any one to humiliate him.

He found it hard to leave his beautiful sitting-room to go to bed that night, and sat long watching the raging storm from his turret window. When he went to sleep, it was with the lights turned on in his bedroom; partly because of his old timidity, and partly so that, if he should wake in the night, there would be no wretched moment of doubt, no horrible suspicion of yellow wall-paper, or of Washington and Calvin above his bed.

On Sunday morning the city was practically snow-bound. Paul breakfasted late, and in the afternoon he fell in with a wild San Francisco boy, a freshman at Yale, who said he had run down for a "little flyer" over Sunday. The young man offered to show Paul the night side of the town, and the two boys went off together after dinner, not returning to the hotel until seven o'clock the next morning. They had started out in the confiding warmth of a champagne friendship, but their parting in the elevator was singularly cool. The fresh-

man pulled himself together to make his train, and Paul went to bed. He awoke at two o'clock in the afternoon, very thirsty and dizzy, and rang for ice-water, coffee, and the Pittsburgh papers.

On the part of the hotel management, Paul excited no suspicion. There was this to be said for him, that he wore his spoils with dignity and in no way made himself conspicuous. His chief greediness lay in his ears and eyes, and his excesses were not offensive ones. His dearest pleasures were the grey winter twilights in his sitting-room; his quiet enjoyment of his flowers, his clothes, his wide divan, his cigarette and his sense of power. He could not remember a time when he had felt so at peace with himself. The mere release from the necessity of petty lying, lying every day and every day, restored his self-respect. He had never lied for pleasure, even at school; but to make himself noticed and admired, to assert his difference from other Cordelia Street boys; and he felt a good deal more manly, more honest, even, now that he had no need for boastful pretensions, now that he could, as his actor friends used to say, "dress the part." It was characteristic that remorse did not occur to him. His golden days went by without a shadow, and he made each as perfect as he could.

On the eighth day after his arrival in New York, he found the whole affair exploited in the Pittsburgh papers, exploited with a wealth of detail which indicated that local news of a sensational nature was at a low ebb. The firm of Denny & Carson announced that the boy's father had refunded the full amount of his theft, and that they had no intention of prosecuting. The Cumberland minister had been interviewed, and expressed his hope of yet reclaiming the motherless lad, and Paul's Sabbath-school teacher declared that she would spare no effort to that end. The rumour had reached Pittsburgh that

the boy had been seen in a New York hotel, and his father had gone East to find him and bring him home.

Paul had just come in to dress for dinner; he sank into a chair, weak in the knees, and clasped his head in his hands. It was to be worse than jail, even; the tepid waters of Cordelia Street were to close over him finally and forever. The grey monotony stretched before him in hopeless, unrelieved years; Sabbath-school, Young People's Meeting, the yellow-papered room, the damp dish-towels; it all rushed back upon him with sickening vividness. He had the old feeling that the orchestra had suddenly stopped, the sinking sensation that the play was over. The sweat broke out on his face, and he sprang to his feet, looked about him with his white, conscious smile, and winked at himself in the mirror. With something of the childish belief in miracles with which he had so often gone to class, all his lessons unlearned, Paul dressed and dashed whistling down the corridor to the elevator.

He had no sooner entered the dining-room and caught the measure of the music, than his remembrance was lightened by his old elastic power of claiming the moment, mounting with it, and finding it all sufficient. The glare and glitter about him, the mere scenic accessories had again, and for the last time, their old potency. He would show himself that he was game, he would finish the thing splendidly. He doubted, more than ever, the existence of Cordelia Street, and for the first time he drank his wine recklessly. Was he not, after all, one of these fortunate beings? Was he not still himself, and in his own place? He drummed a nervous accompaniment to the music and looked about him, telling himself over and over that it had paid.

He reflected drowsily, to the swell of the violin and the chill sweetness of his wine, that he might have done it more

wisely. He might have caught an outbound steamer and been well out of their clutches before now. But the other side of the world had seemed too far away and too uncertain then; he could not have waited for it; his need had been too sharp. If he had to choose over again, he would do the same thing tomorrow. He looked affectionately about the dining-room, now gilded with a soft mist. Ah, it had paid indeed!

Paul was awakened next morning by a painful throbbing in his head and feet. He had thrown himself across the bed without undressing, and had slept with his shoes on. His limbs and hands were lead heavy, and his tongue and throat were parched. There came upon him one of those fateful attacks of clear-headedness that never occurred except when he was physically exhausted and his nerves hung loose. He lay still and closed his eyes and let the tide of realities wash over him.

His father was in New York; "stopping at some joint or other," he told himself. The memory of successive summers on the front stoop fell upon him like a weight of black water. He had not a hundred dollars left; and he knew now, more than ever, that money was everything, the wall that stood between all he loathed and all he wanted. The thing was winding itself up; he had thought of that on his first glorious day in New York, and had even provided a way to snap the thread. It lay on his dressing-table now; he had got it out last night when he came blindly up from dinner, — but the shiny metal hurt his eyes, and he disliked the look of it, anyway.

He rose and moved about with a painful effort, succumbing now and again to attacks of nausea. It was the old depression exaggerated; all the world had become Cordelia Street. Yet somehow he was not afraid of anything, was absolutely calm; perhaps because he had looked into the dark corner at last, and knew. It was bad enough, what he saw there; but somehow



not so bad as his long fear of it had been. He saw everything clearly now. He had a feeling that he had made the best of it, that he had lived the sort of life he was meant to live, and for half an hour he sat staring at the revolver. But he told himself that was not the way, so he went downstairs and took a cab to the ferry.

When Paul arrived at Newark, he got off the train and took another cab, directing the driver to follow the Pennsylvania tracks out of the town. The snow lay heavy on the roadways and had drifted deep in the open fields. Only here and there the dead grass or dried weed stalks projected, singularly black, above it. Once well into the country, Paul dismissed the carriage and walked, floundering along the tracks, his mind a medley of irrelevant things. He seemed to hold in his brain an actual picture of everything he had seen that morning. He remembered every feature of both his drivers, the toothless old woman from whom he had bought the red flowers in his coat, the agent from whom he had got his ticket, and all of his fellow-passengers on the ferry. His mind, unable to cope with vital matters near at hand, worked feverishly and deftly at sorting and grouping these images. They made for him a part of the ugliness of the world, of the ache in his head, and the bitter burning on his tongue. He stooped and put a handful of snow into his mouth as he walked, but that, too, seemed hot. When he reached a little hillside, where the tracks ran through a cut some twenty feet below him, he stopped and sat down.

The carnations in his coat were drooping with the cold, he noticed; all their red glory over. It occurred to him that all the flowers he had seen in the show windows that first night must have gone the same way, long before this. It was only one splendid breath they had, in spite of their brave mockery

at the winter outside the glass. It was a losing game in the end, it seemed, this revolt against the homilies by which the world is run. Paul took one of the blossoms carefully from his coat and scooped a little hole in the snow, where he covered it up. Then he dozed a while, from his weak condition, seeming insensible to the cold.

The sound of an approaching train woke him, and he started to his feet, remembering only his resolution, and afraid lest he should be too late. He stood watching the approaching locomotive, his teeth chattering, his lips drawn away from them in a frightened smile; once or twice he glanced nervously sideways, as though he were being watched. When the right moment came, he jumped. As he fell, the folly of his haste occurred to him with merciless clearness, the vastness of what he had left undone. There flashed through his brain, clearer than ever before, the blue of Adriatic water, the yellow of Algerian sands.

He felt something strike his chest, — his body was being thrown swiftly through the air, on and on, immeasurably far and fast, while his limbs gently relaxed. Then, because the picture-making mechanism was crushed, the disturbing visions flashed into black, and Paul dropped back into the immense design of things.

## THE SMART ALECK <sup>1</sup>

By IRVIN S. COBB

CAP'N BUCK FLUTER, holding his watch in the approved conductor's grip, glanced back and forth the short length of the four-five accommodation and raised his free hand in warning:

"All aboard!"

From almost above his head it came:

"If you can't get a board get a scantlin'!"

Clustered at the White or shady end of the station, the sovereign Caucasians of Swango rocked up against one another in the unbridled excess of their merriment. Farther away, at the Coloured or sunny end of the platform, the assembled representatives of the African population guffawed loudly, though respectfully. To almost anyone having the gift of spontaneous repartee it might have occurred to suggest the advisability of getting a plank provided you could not get a board. It took Gash Tuttle to think up scantling.

The humourist folded his elbows on the ledge of the window and leaned his head and shoulders out of the car, considering his people whimsically, yet benignantly. He wore attire suitable for travelling — a dented-in grey felt hat, adhering perilously to the rearmost slope of his scalp; a mail-order suit of light tan, with slashed seams and rows of buttons extending up the sleeves almost to the elbows; a hard-surfaced tie of pale blue satin; a lavender shirt, agreeably relieved by pink longitudinal stripings.

Except his eyes, which rather protruded, and his front teeth,

<sup>1</sup> "The Smart Aleck," from *Local Color*, by Irvin S. Cobb. Reprinted by permission of George H. Doran Company, Publishers. Copyright 1916.

which undoubtedly projected, all his features were in a state of active retreat — only, his nose retreated one way and his chin the other. The assurance of a popular idol who knows no rival was in his pose and in his poise. Alexander the Great had that look — if we may credit the likenesses of him still extant — and Napoleon Bonaparte had it, and David Garrick, to quote a few conspicuous examples.

Alone, of all those within hearing, Cap'n Buck Fluter did not laugh. Indeed, he did not even grin.

"All right, black boy," he said. "Let's go away from here!"

The porter snatched up the wooden box that rested on the earth, flung it on the car platform and projected his person nimbly after it. Cap'n Buck swung himself up the step with one hand on the rail. The engine spat out a mouthful of hot steam and the wheels began to turn.

"Good-by, my honeys, 'cause I'm gone!" called out Mr. Tuttle, and he waved a fawn-coloured arm in adieu to his courtiers, black and white. "I'm a-goin' many and a-many a mile from you. Don't take in no bad money while your popper's away."

The station agent, in black calico sleeve-protectors and celluloid eyeshade, stretched the upper half of his body out the cubby-hole that served him for an office.

"Oh, you Gash!" he called. "Give my love to all the ladies."

The two groups on the platform waited, all expectant for the retort. Instantly it sped back to them, above the clacking voice of the train:

"That's all you ever would give 'em, ain't it?"

Mr. Gip Dismukes, who kept the livery stable, slapped Mr. Gene Brothers, who drove the bus, a resounding slap on the back.

"Ain't he jest ez quick ez a flash?" he demanded of the company generally.

The station agent withdrew himself inside his sanctum, his sides heaving to his mirthful emotions. He had drawn a fire acknowledged to be deadly at any range, but he was satisfied. The laugh was worth the wound.

Through the favoured section traversed by the common carrier to whose care genius incarnate had just committed his precious person there are two kinds of towns — bus towns and non-bus towns. A bus town lies at an appreciable distance from the railroad, usually with a hill intervening, and a bus, which is painted yellow, plies between town and station. But a non-bus town is a town that has for its civic equator the tracks themselves. The station forms one angle of the public square; and, within plain sight and easy walking reach, the post office and at least two general stores stand; and handily near by is a one-story bank built of a stucco composition purporting to represent granite, thus signifying solidity and impregnability; and a two-story hotel, white, with green blinds, and porches running all the way across the front; also hitch rails; a livery stable; and a Masonic Hall.

Swango belonged to the former category. It was over the hill, a hot and dusty eighth of a mile away. So, having watched the departing four-five accommodation until it diminished to a smudgy dot where the V of the rails melted together and finally vanished, the assembled Swangoans settled back in postures of ease to wait for the up train due at three-eight, but reported two hours and thirty minutes late. There would still be ample time after it came and went to get home for supper.

The contemptuous travelling man who once said that only three things ever happened in Swango — morning, afternoon



and night — perpetrated a libel, for he wilfully omitted mention of three other daily events: the cannon-ball, tearing through without stopping in the early forenoon; the three-eight up; and the four-five down.

So they sat and waited; but a spirit of depression, almost of sadness, affected one and all. It was as though a beaming light had gone out of their lives. Ginger Marable, porter and runner of the Mansard House, voiced the common sentiment of both races as he lolled on a baggage truck in the sunshine, with his cap of authority, crowned by a lettered tin diadem, shoved far back upon his woolly skull.

“Dat Mistah Gashney Tuttle he sho is a quick ketcher,” stated Ginger with a soft chuckle. “W’ite an’ black — we suttinly will miss Mistah Tuttle twell he gits back home ag’in.”

Borne away from his loyal subjects to the pulsing accompaniment of the iron horse’s snorted breath, the subject of this commentary extended himself on his red plush seat and considered his fellow travellers with a view to honing his agile fancy on the whetstones of their duller mentalities. On the whole, they promised but poor sport. Immediately in front of him sat a bride and groom, readily recognisable at a glance for what they were — the bride in cream-coloured cashmere, with many ribbons; the groom in stiff black diagonals, with braided seams, and a white lawn tie. A red-faced man who looked as though he might be a deputy sheriff from somewhere slept uneasily one seat in the rear. He had his shoes off, revealing grey yarn socks. His mouth was ajar, and down in his throat he snored screechily, like a planing mill. The youngest member of a family group occupying two seats just across the aisle whimpered a desire. Its mother rummaged in a shoebox containing, among other delicacies, hard-boiled eggs, salt and pepper mixed

and enveloped in a paper squill, blueberry pie, leaking profusely, and watermelon-rind preserves, and found what she sought — the lower half of a fried chicken leg. Satisfied by this gift the infant ceased from fretful repining, sucking contentedly at the meat end; and between sucks hammered contentedly with the drumstick on the seat back and window ledge, leaving lardy smears there in the dust.

Cap'n Buck — captain by virtue of having a regular passenger run — came through the car, collecting tickets. At no time particularly long on temper, he was decidedly short of it to-day. He was fifteen minutes behind his schedule — no unusual thing — but the locomotive was misbehaving. Likewise a difference of opinion had arisen over the proper identity of a holder of mileage in the smoker. He halted alongside Gash Tuttle, swaying on his legs to the roll and pitch of the car floor.

"Tickets?" he demanded crisply.

"Wee Gates, Cap," answered the new passenger jovially. "How does your copperosity seem to sagashuate this evenin'?"

"Where goin'?" said Fluter, ignoring the pleasantry. "I'm in a hurry. What station?"

"Well," countered the irrepressible one, "what stations have you got?"

Cap'n Buck Fluter's cold eye turned meaningly toward the bell cord, which dipped like a tired clothesline overhead, and he snapped two fingers peevishly.

"Son," he said almost softly, "don't monkey with me. This here ain't my day for foolin'!"

Favoured son of the high gods though he was, Gash Tuttle knew instantly now that this was indeed no day for fooling. Cap'n Buck was not a large man, but he had a way of growing to meet and match emergencies. He handled the Sunday excursions, which was the acid test of a trainman's grit. Coltish

youths, alcoholically keened up or just naturally high spirited, who got on his train looking for trouble nearly always got off looking for a doctor. As regards persons wishful of stealing a ride, they never tried to travel with Cap'n Buck Flutter oftener than once. Frequently, for a period of time measurable by days or weeks, they were in no fit state to be travelling with anyone except a trained nurse.

Gash Tuttle quit his fooling. Without further ado — whatever an ado is — he surrendered his ticket, receiving in exchange a white slip with punchmarks in it, to wear in his hat-band. Next came the train butcher bearing gum, purple plums in paper cornucopias, examples of the light literature of the day, oranges which were overgreen, and bananas which were overripe, as is the way with a train butcher's oranges and bananas the continent over. In contrast with the conductor's dourness the train butcher's mood was congenially inclined to persiflage.

After an exchange of spirited repartee, at which the train butcher by an admiring shake of the head tacitly confessed himself worsted, our hero purchased a paper-backed work entitled, *The Jolly Old Drummer's Private Joke Book*. This volume, according to the whispered confidences of the seller, contained tales of so sprightly a character that even in sealed covers it might be sent by mail only at the sender's peril; moreover, the wink which punctuated this disclosure was in itself a promise of the spicy entertainment to be derived from perusal thereof. The price at present was but fifty cents; later it would go up to a dollar a copy; this, then, was a special and extraordinary rate.

The train continued on its course — not hurriedly, but with reasonable steadfastness and singleness of purpose. After much the same fashion the sun went down. The bride re-

peatedly whisked cindery deposits off her cashmered lap; the large-faced man, being awakened by one of his own snores, put on his shoes and indulged in fine-cut tobacco, internally applied; but the youngest passenger now slept all curled up in a moist little bundle, showing an expanse of plump neck much mottled by heat-rash, and clutching in one greased and gritted fist the denuded shank-bone of a chicken with a frieze of gnawed tendons adhering to its larger joint.

At intervals the train stopped at small way stations, bus or non-bus in character as the case might be, to let somebody off or somebody on. Cap'n Buck now made his trips carrying his lantern — the ornate nickel-plated one that had been awarded to him in the voting contest for the most popular trainman at the annual fair and bazaar of True Blue Lodge of the Junior Order of American Mechanics. It had his proper initials — J. J. F. — chased on its glass chimney in old English script, very curlicue and ornamental. He carried it in the crook of his left elbow with the handle round his biceps; and when he reached the end of his run he would extinguish its flame, not by blowing it out but by a quick, short, expert jerk of his arm. This is a trick all conductors seek to acquire; some of them succeed.

Twilight, the stage manager of night, had stolen insidiously on the scene, shortening up the backgrounds and blurring the perspectives; and the principal character of this tale, straining his eyes over the fine print, had reached the next to the last page of *The Jolly Old Drummer's Private Joke Book* and was beginning to wonder why the postal authorities should be so finicky in such matters and in a dim way to wish he had his fifty cents back, when with a glad shriek of relief the locomotive, having bumped over a succession of yard switches, drew up under a long open shed alongside a dumpy brick structure.

To avoid any possible misunderstanding this building was labelled Union Depot in large letters and at both ends.

Being the terminus of the division, it was the train's destination and the destination of Mr. Tuttle. He possessed himself of an imitation leather handbag and descended on solid earth with the assured manner of a seasoned and experienced traveller. Doubtless because of the flurry created by the train's arrival and the bustling about of other arrivals his advent created no visible stir among the crowd at the terminal. At least he noticed none. Still, these people had no way of knowing who he was.

In order to get the Union Depot closer to the railroad it had been necessary to place it some distance away from the heart of things; even so, metropolitan evidences abounded. A Belt Line trolley car stood stationary, awaiting passengers; a vociferous row of negro hackmen were kept in their proper places by a uniformed policeman; and on the horizon to the westward a yellow radiance glowed above an intervening comb of spires and chimneys, showing where the inhabitants of the third largest second-class city in the state made merry at carnival and street-fair, to celebrate the dedication and opening of their new Great White Way — a Great White Way seven blocks long and spangled at sixty-foot intervals with arc lights disposed in pairs on ornamental iron standards. Hence radiance.

Turning westward, therefore, Mr. Tuttle found himself looking along a circumscribed vista of one-story buildings with two-story fronts — that is to say, each wooden front wall extended up ten or fifteen feet above the peak of the sloping roof behind it, so that, viewed full-on, the building would have the appearance of being a floor taller than it really was. To add to the pleasing illusion certain of these superstructures had windows painted elaborately on their slab surfaces; but to one



seeking a profile view the false work betrayed a razor-like thinness, as patently flat and artificial as stage scenery.

Travellers from the Eastern seaboard have been known to gibe at this transparent artifice. Even New York flat dwellers, coming direct from apartment houses which are all marble foyers and gold-leaf elevator grilles below and all dark cubby-holes and toy kitchens above, have been known to gibe; which fact is here set forth merely to prove that a sense of humour depends largely on the point of view.

To our Mr. Tuttle such deceits were but a part of the ordered architectural plan of things, and they moved him not. What did interest him was to note that the nearest of these bogusly exalted buildings displayed, above swinging twin doors, a cluster of lights and a sign testifying that this was the First Chance Saloon. Without looking he sensed that the reverse of that Janus-faced sign would advertise this same establishment as being the Last Chance. He did not know about Janus, but he did know about saloons that are handily adjacent to union depots. Moreover, an inner consciousness advised him that after a dry sixty-mile trip he thirsted amain. He took up his luggage and crossed the road, and entered through the knee-high swinging doors.

There was a bar and a bar mirror behind it. The bar was decorated at intervals with rectangles of fly paper, on the sticky surfaces of which great numbers of flies were gummed fast in a perished or perishing state; but before they became martyrs to the fad of sanitation these victims had left their footprints thickly on the mirror and on the fringes of coloured tissue paper that dangled from the ceiling. In a front corner, against a window, was a lunch counter, flanked on one side by stools and serving as a barricade for an oil stove and shelves of cove oysters in cans, and hams and cheeses for slicing, and vinegar

cruets and pepper casters and salt cellars crusted with the saline deposits of the years. A solitary patron was lounging against the bar in earnest conversation with the barkeeper; but the presiding official of the food-purveying department must have been absent on business or pleasure, for of him there was no sign.

Gash Tuttle ordered a beer. The barkeeper filled a tall flagon with brew drawn from the wood, wiped the clinging froth from its brim with a spatulate tool of whittled cedar, and placed the drink before the newcomer, who paid for it out of a silver dollar. Even as Mr. Tuttle scooped in his change and buried the lower part of his face in the circumference of the schooner he became aware that the other customer had drawn nearer and was idly rattling a worn leather cup, within which dice rapped against the sides like little bony ghosts uneasy to escape from their cabinet at a séance.

The manipulator of the dice held a palm cupped over the mouth of the cup to prevent their escape. He addressed the barkeeper:

"Flem," he said, "you're such a wisenheimer, I'll make you a proposition: I'll shake three of these here dice out, and no matter whut they roll I'll betcha I kin tell without lookin' whut the tops and bottoms will come to — whut the spots'll add up to."

The other desisted from rinsing glassware in a pail beneath the bar.

"Which is that?" he inquired sceptically. "You kin tell beforehand whut the top and bottom spots'll add up?"

"Ary time and every time!"

"And let me roll 'em myself?"

"And let you roll 'em yourself — let anybody roll 'em. I don't need to touch 'em, even."

"How much'll you risk that you kin do that, Fox?" Roused greed was in the speaker's tone.

"Oh, make it fur the drinks," said Fox — "jest fur the drinks. I ain't aimin' to take your money away frum you. I got all the money I need." For the first time he seemed to become aware of a third party and he turned and let a friendly hand fall on the stranger's shoulder. "Tell you whut, Flem, we'll make it drinks fur this gent too. Come on, brother," he added; "you're in on this. It's my party if I lose, which I won't, and ole Flem's party if he loses, which he shore will."

It was the warmth of his manner as much as the generosity of his invitation that charmed Mr. Tuttle. The very smile of this man Fox invited friendship; for it was a broad smile, rich in proteids and butterfats. Likewise his personality was as attractively cordial as his attire was striking and opulent.

"Slide or slip, let 'er rip!" said Mr. Tuttle, quoting the poetic words of a philosopher of an earlier day.

"That's the talk!" said Fox genially. He pushed the dice box across the bar. "Go to it, bo! Roll them bones! The figure is twenty-one!"

From the five cubes in the cup the barkeeper eliminated two. He agitated the receptacle violently and then flirited out the three survivors on the wood. They jostled and crocked against one another, rolled over and stopped. Their uppermost faces showed an ace, a six and a five.

"Twelve!" said Flem.

"Twelve it is," echoed Fox.

"A dozen raw," confirmed Gash Tuttle, now thoroughly in the spirit of it.

"All right, then," said Fox, flashing a beam of admiration toward the humourist. "Now turn 'em over, Flem — turn 'em over careful."

Flem obeyed, displaying an ace, a deuce and a six.

"And nine more makes twenty-one in all!" chortled Fox triumphantly.

As though dazed, the barkeeper shook his head.

"Well, Foxey, ole pardner, you shore got me that time," he confessed begrudgingly. "Whut'll it be, gents? Here, I reckon the cigars is on me too, after that." From a glass-topped case at the end of the bar alongside Gash Tuttle he produced a full box and extended it hospitably. "The smokes is on the house — dip in, gents. Dip in. Try an Old Hickory; them's pure Tampas — ten cents straight."

He drew the beers — large ones for the two, a small one for himself — and raised his own glass to them.

"Here's to you and t'ward you!" he said.

"Ef I hadn't a-met you I wouldn't a-knowed you," shot back Gash Tuttle with the lightning spontaneity of one whose wit moves in boltlike brilliancy; and at that they both laughed loudly and, as though dazzled by his flashes, bestowed on him the look that is ever the sweetest tribute to the jester's talents.

The toast to a better acquaintance being quaffed and lights exchanged, the still non-plussed Flem addressed the winners:

"Well, boys, I thought I knowed all there was to know about dice — poker dice and crap dice too; but live and learn, as the feller says. Say, Fox, put me on to that trick — it'll come in handy. I'll ketch Joe on it when he gits back," and he nodded toward the lunch counter.

"You don't need to know no more'n you know about it already," expounded Fox. "It's bound to come out that way."

"How is it bound to come out that way?"

"Why, Flem, it's jest plain arithmetic; mathematics — that's all. Always the tops and bottoms of ary three dice come to twenty-one. Here, gimme the cup and I'll prove it."

In rapid succession, three times, he shook the cubes out. It was indeed as the wizard had said. No matter what the sequence, the complete tally was ever the same — twenty-one.

"Now who'd 'a' thought it!" exclaimed Flem delightedly. "Say, a feller could win a pile of dough workin' that trick! I'd 'a' fell fur some real money myself."

"That's why I made it fur the drinks," said the magnanimous Fox. "I wouldn't put it over on a friend — not for no amount; because it's a sure-thing proposition. It jest naturally can't lose! I wouldn't 'a' tried to skin this pardner here with it even if I'd 'a' thought I could." And once more his hand fell in flattering camaraderie on a fawn-coloured shoulder. "I know a regular guy that's likewise a wise guy as soon as I see him. But with rank strangers it'd be plumb different. The way I look at it, a stranger's money is anybody's money —"

He broke off abruptly as the door-hinges creaked. A tall, thin individual wearing a cap, a squint, and a cigarette, all on the same side of his head, had entered. He stopped at the lunch counter as though desirous of purchasing food.

"Sh-h! Listen!" Fox's subdued tones reached only the barkeeper and Mr. Tuttle. "That feller looks like a mark to me. D'ye know him, Flem?"

"Never seen him before," whispered back Flem after a covert scrutiny of the latest arrival.

"Fine!" commented Fox, speaking with rapidity, but still with low-toned caution. "Jest to test it, let's see if that sucker'll fall. Here" — he shoved the dice cup into Gash Tuttle's grasp — "you be playin' with the bones, sorter careless. You kin have the first bet, because I've already took a likin' to you. Then, if he's willin' to go a second time, I'll take him on fur a few simoleons." The arch plotter fell into an attitude of elaborate indifference. "Go ahead, Flem; you toll him in."



Given a guarantee of winning, and who among us is not a born gamester? Gash Tuttle's cheeks flushed with sporting blood as he grabbed for the cup. All his corpuscles turned to red and white chips — red ones mostly. As for the barkeeper, he beyond doubt had the making of a conspirator in him. He took the cue instantly.

"Sorry, friend," he called out, "but the grub works is closed down temporary. Anything I kin do fur you?"

"Well," said the stranger, edging over, "I did want a fried-aig sandwich, but I might change my mind. Got any cold lager on tap?"

"Join us," invited Fox; "we're jest fixin' to have one. Make it beer all round," he ordered the barkeeper without waiting for the newcomer's answer.

Beer all round it was. Gash Tuttle, too eager for gore to more than sip his, toyed with the dice, rolling them out and scooping them up again.

"Want to shake for the next round, anybody?" innocently inquired the squint-eyed person, observing this byplay.

"The next round's on the house," announced Flem, obeying a wink of almost audible emphasis from Fox.

"This here gent thinks he's some hand with the bones," explained Fox, addressing the stranger and flirting a thumb toward Gash Tuttle. "He was sayin' jest as you come in the door yonder that he could let anybody else roll three dice, and then he could tell, without lookin' even, whut the tops and bottoms would add up to."

"Huh?" grunted the squinty-eyed man. "Has he got any money in his clothes that says he kin do that? Where I come frum, money talks." He eyed Gash Tuttle truculently, as though daring him to be game.

"My money talks too!" said Mr. Tuttle with nervous

alacrity. He felt in an inner vest pocket, producing a modest packet of bills. All eyes were focused on it.

"That's the stuff!" said Fox with mounting enthusiasm. "How much are you two gents goin' to bet one another? Make it fur real money — that is, if you're both game!"

"If he don't touch the dice at all I'll bet him fur his whole roll," said the impetuous newcomer.

"That's fair enough, I reckon," said Fox. "Tell you whut — to make it absolutely fair I'll turn the dice over myself and Flem'll hold the stakes. Then there can't be no kick comin' from nobody whatsoever, kin there?" He faced their prospective prey. "How strong are you?" he demanded, almost sneeringly. "How much are you willin' to put up against my pardner here?"

"Any amount! Any amount!" snapped back the other, squinting past Fox at Gash Tuttle's roll until one eye was a button and the other a buttonhole. "Twenty-five — thirty — thirty-five — as much as forty dollars. That's how game I am."

Avarice gnawed at the taproots of Gash Tuttle's being, but caution raised a warning hand. Fifteen was half of what he had and thirty was all. Besides, why risk all on the first wager, even though there was no real risk? A person so impulsively sportive as this victim would make a second bet doubtlessly. He ignored the stealthy little kick his principal accomplice dealt him on the shin. "I'll make it fur fifteen," he said, licking his lips.

"If that's as fur as you kin go, all right," said the slit-eyed man, promptly posting his money in the outstretched hand of the barkeeper, who in the same motion took over a like amount from the slightly trembling fingers of the challenger.

Squint-eye picked up the dice cup and rattled its occupants.

"Come on now!" he bantered Gash Tuttle. "Whut'll they add up, tops and bottoms?"

"Twenty-one!" said Mr. Tuttle.

"Out they come, then!"

And out they did come, dancing together, tumbling and somersaulting, and finally halting — a deuce, a trey and a four.

"Three and two is five and four is nine," Gash Tuttle read off the pips. "Now turn 'em over!" he bade Fox. "That's your job — turn 'em over!" He was all tremulous and quiv-ery inside.

In silence Fox drew the nearest die toward him and slowly capsize'd it. "Four," he announced.

He flipped the deuce end for end, revealing its bottom: "Five!"

He reached for the remaining die — the four-spot. Dragging it toward him, his large fingers encompassed it for one fleeting instant, hiding it from view entirely; then he raised his hand: "Six!"

"Makin' twenty-one in all," stuttered Gash Tuttle. He reached for the stakes.

"Nix on that quick stuff!" yelled his opponent, and dashed his hand aside. "The tops come to nine and the bottoms to fifteen — that's twenty-four, the way I figger. You lose!" He pouched the money gleefully.

Stunned, Gash Tuttle contemplated the upturned facets of the three dice. It was true — it was all too true! Consternation, or a fine imitation of that emotion, filled the countenances of Flem and of Fox.

"That's the first time I ever seen that happen," Fox whispered in the loser's ear. "Bet him again — bet high — and git it all back. That's the ticket!"

Mr. Tuttle shook his head miserably, but stubbornly. For

this once, in the presence of crushing disaster, the divine powers of retort failed him. He didn't speak — he couldn't!

"Piker money! Piker money!" chanted the winner. "Still, ever' little bit helps — eh, boys?"

And then and there, before Gash Tuttle's bulging and horrified eyes, he split up the winnings in the proportion of five for Flem and five for Fox and five for himself. Of a sudden the loser was shouldered out of the group. He looked not into friendly faces, but at contemptuous backs and heaving shoulders. The need for play acting being over, the play actors took their ease and divided their pay. The mask was off. Treachery stood naked and unashamed.

Reaching blindly for his valise, Gash Tuttle stumbled for the door, a load lying on his daunted spirit as heavy as a stone. Flem hailed him.

"Say, hold on!" He spoke kindly. "Ain't that your quarter yonder?"

He pointed to a coin visible against the flat glass cover of the cigar case.

"Sure it is — it's yourn. I seen you leave it there when I give you the change out of that dollar and purposed to tell you 'bout it at the time, but it slipped my mind. Go on and pick it up — it's yourn. You're welcome to it if you take it now!"

Automatically Gash Tuttle reached for the quarter — small salvage from a great and overwhelming loss. His nails scraped the glass, touching only glass. The quarter was cunningly glued to its underside. Surely this place was full of pitfalls. A guffawed chorus of derision rudely smote his burning ears.

"On your way, sucker! On your way!" gibed the perfidious Fox, swinging about with his elbows braced against the bar and a five-dollar bill held with a touch of cruel jauntiness between two fingers.

"Whut you got in the gripsack — hay samples or punkins?" jeered the exultant Slit-Eye.

"Yes; whut is the valise fur?" came Flem's parting taunt. Under their goadings his spirit rallied.

"Cat's fur, to make kitten's britches!" he said. Then, as a final shot: "You fellers needn't think you're so darned smart — I know jest exactly how you done it!"

He left them to chew on that. The parting honours were his, he felt, but the spoils of war — alas! — remained in the camp of the enemy. Scarcely twenty minutes at the outside had elapsed since his advent into city life, and already one-half of the hoarded capital he had meant should sustain him for a whole gala week was irretrievably gone, leaving behind an emptiness, a void as it were, which ached like the socket of a newly drawn tooth.

Vague, formless thoughts of reprisal, of vengeance exacted an hundredfold when opportunity should fitly offer, flitted through his numbed brain. Meantime though adventure beckoned; half a mile away or less a Great White Way and a street-fair awaited his coming. That saffron flare against the sky yonder was an invitation and a promise. Sighing, he shifted his valise from one hand to the other.

The Belt Line car, returning stationward, bore him with small loss of time straightway to the very centre of excitement; to where bunting waved on store fronts and flag standards swayed from trolley poles, converting the County Square into a Court of Honour, and a myriad lights glowed golden russet through the haze of dust kicked up by the hurrying feet of merrymaking thousands. Barkers barked and brass bands brayed; strange cries of man and beast arose, and crowds eddied to and fro like wind-blown leaves in a gusty November. And all was gaiety and abandon. From the confusion certain



sounds detached themselves, becoming intelligible to the human understanding. As for example:

“Remembah, good people, the cool of the evenin’ is the time to view the edgycated ostritch and mark his many peculiarities!”

And this:

“The big red hots! The g-e-r-reat big, juicy, sizzlin’ red hots! The eriginal hot-dog sandwige — fi’ cents, halluf a dime, the twentieth part of a dollah! Here y’are! The genuwine Mexican hairless Frankfurter fer fi’ cents!”

And this:

“Cornfetti! Cornfetti! All the colours of the rainbow! All the pleasures of the Maudie Graw! A large full sack for a nickel! Buy cornfetti and enjoy yourselves.”

And so on and so forth.

The forlorn youth, a half-fledged school-teacher from a back district, who had purchased the county rights of a patent razor sharpener from a polished gentleman who had had to look at the map before he even knew the name of the county, stood on a dry-goods box at the corner of Jefferson and Yazoo, dimly regretful of the good money paid out for license and unsalable stock, striving desperately to remember and enunciate the patter taught him by the gifted promoter. For the twentieth time he lifted his voice, essaying his word-formula in husky and stuttering accents for the benefit of swirling multitudes, who never stopped to listen:

“Friends, I have here the Infallible Patent Razor Sharpener. ’Twill sharpen razors, knives, scissors, scythe blades or any edged tool. If you don’t believe it will” — He paused, forgetting the tag line; then cleared his throat and improvised a finish: “If you don’t believe it will — why, it will!” It was a lame conclusion and fruitful of no sales.

How different the case with a talented professional stationed half a block down the street, who nonchalantly coiled and whirled and threw a lasso at nothing; then gathered in the rope and coiled and threw it again, always at nothing at all, until an audience collected, being drawn by a desire to know the meaning of a performance seemingly so purposeless. Then, dropping the rope, he burst into a stirring panegyric touching on the miraculous qualifications of the Ajax Matchless Cleaning and Washing Powder, which made bathing a sheer pleasure and household drudgery a joy.

Never for one moment abating the flow of his eloquence, this person produced a tiny vial, held it aloft, uncorked it, shook twenty drops of its colourless fluid contents on the corrugated surface of a seemingly new and virgin sponge; then gently kneaded and massaged the sponge until — lo and behold! — lather formed and grew and mounted and foamed, so that the yellow lump became a mass of creamy white suds the size of a peck measure, and from it dripped huge bubbles that foamed about his feet and expired prismatically, as the dolphin was once believed to expire, leaving smears upon the boards whereon the operator stood.

Thereat dimes flowed in on him in clinking streams, and bottles of the Matchless flowed from him until, apparently grown weary of commerce, he abandoned his perch, avowedly for refreshment, but really — this being a trade secret — to rub shavings of soft yellow soap into the receptive pores of a fresh sponge and so make it ready against the next demonstration.

Through such scenes Gash Tuttle wandered, a soul apart. He was of the carnival, but not in it — not as yet. With a pained mental jolt he observed that about him men of his own age wore garments of a novel and fascinating cut. By contrast his own wardrobe seemed suddenly grown commonplace

and prosaic; also, these city dwellers spoke a tongue that, though lacking, as he inwardly conceded, in the ready pungency of his own speech, nevertheless had a saucy and attractive savour of novelty in its phrasing. Indeed, he felt lonely. So must a troubadour of old have felt when set adrift in an alien and hostile land. So must the shining steel feel when separated from the flint on which it strikes forth its sparks of fire. I take it a steel never really craves for its flint until it parts from it.

As he wormed through a group of roistering youth of both sexes he tripped over his own valise; a wadded handful of confetti struck him full in the cheek and from behind him came a gurgle of laughter. It was borne in on him that he was the object of mirth and not its creator. His neck burned. Certainly the most distressing situation which may beset a humourist follows hard on the suspicion that folks are laughing — not with him, but at him!

He hurried on as rapidly as one might hurry in such crowded ways. He was aware now of a sensation of emptiness which could not be attributed altogether to the depression occasioned by his experience at the First and Last Chance Saloon; and he took steps to stay it. He purchased and partook of hamburger sandwiches rich in chopped onions.

Later it would be time to find suitable lodgings. The more alluring of the pay-as-you-enter attractions were yet to be tested. By way of a beginning he handed over a ten-cent piece to a swarthy person behind a blue pedestal, and mounting eight wooden steps to a platform he passed behind a flapping canvas curtain. There, in company with perhaps a dozen other patrons, he leaned over a wooden rail and gazed downward into a shallow tarpaulin-lined den where a rather drowsy-appearing, half-nude individual, evidently of Ethiopian an-

tecedents, first toyed with some equally drowsy specimens of the reptile kingdom and then partook sparingly and with no particular avidity of the tail of a very small garter snake.

Chance, purely, had led Gash Tuttle to select the establishment of Osay rather than that of the Educated Ostrich, or the Amphibious Man, or Fatima the Pearl of the Harem, for his first plunge into carnival pleasures; but chance is the hinge on which many moving events swing. It was so in this instance.

Osay had finished a light but apparently satisfying meal and the audience was tailing away when Gash Tuttle, who happened to be the rearmost of the departing patrons, felt a detaining touch on his arm. He turned to confront a man in his shirtsleeves — a large man with a pock-marked face, a drooping moustache and a tiger-claw watch charm on his vest. It was the same man who, but a minute before, had delivered a short yet flattering discourse touching the early life and manners and habits of the consumer of serpents — in short, the manager of the show and presumably its owner.

“Say!” began this gentleman.

“Say yourself,” flashed Gash, feeling himself on safe ground once more; “your mouth’s open.”

The man grinned in appreciation of the thrust — a wincing grin, as though owning himself beaten in the very first sally.

“All right, old scout,” he said jovially, “I will. Come back here where nobody can’t hear me while I say it.” He drew the younger man to the inner side of the platform and sank his voice to a confidential rumble. “Soon as I seen you comin’ in I says to myself, ‘That’s the party I’m lookin’ for.’ You don’t live here in this town, do you?”

Gash Tuttle shook his head and started to speak, but the

big man was going on. Plainly he was not one to waste time in idle preliminaries:

"That's the way I doped it. You're in the profesh, ain't you? You've been workin' this street-fair game somewhere, ain't you?" "

"No," Gash Tuttle confessed, yet somehow at the same time feeling flattered.

"Well, that just goes to show a guy can be fooled," said the Osay man. "I'd 'a' swore you was on to all the ropes in this biz. Anyway, I know just by the cut of your jib you're the party I'm lookin' for. That's why I braced you. My name's Fornaro; this here is my outfit. I want somebody to throw in with me — and I've made up my mind you're the party I'm lookin' for."

Once bitten, twice shy; and Gash Tuttle's fifteen-dollar bite was still raw and bleeding. He started to pull away.

"I wouldn't choose to invest in anything more until I'd looked it over," he began. The large man grasped him by his two lapels and broke in on him, drowning out the protest before it was well started.

"Who said anything about anybody investin' anything?" he demanded. "Did I? No. Then listen to me a minute — just one minute. I'm in a hurry my own self and I gotta hand you this proposition out fast."

Sincerity was in his tone; was in his manner too. Even as he spoke his gaze roved past Gash Tuttle toward the tarpaulin draperies which contributed to their privacy, and he sweat freely; a suetlike dew spangled his brow. There was a noise outside. He listened intently, then fixed a mesmerising stare on Gash Tuttle and spoke with great rapidity and greater earnestness:

"You see, I got some other interests here. Besides this pit



show, I'm a partner in a store pitch and a mitt-joint; and, what with everything, I'm overworked. That's the God's truth — I'm overworked! What I need is a manager here. And soon as I seen how you handled yourself I says to myself, 'That's the party I want to hire for manager.' What did you say your name was?"

"Tuttle — Gashney P. Tut—"

"That's enough — the Tuttle part will do for me. Now, Tuttle, set down that there keister of yours — that gripsack — and listen. I gotta go down the street for a half hour — maybe an hour — and I want you to take charge. You're manager while I'm gone — the joint is yours till I git back. And to-night, later on, we'll fix up a deal together. If you think you like the job we'll make a reg'lar arrangement; we'll make it permanent instid of temporary. See?"

"But — but — "

"But nothin'! I want to find out if my first judgment about you is correct. See? I want to make a test. See? That's it — a test. You ain't goin' to have much to do, first off. The nigger is all right s'long he gits his dope." He motioned toward the canvas-lined retreat where Osay now dozed heavily among the coils of his somnolent pets. "And Crummy — that's my outside man — kin handle the front and make the spiel, and take in what money comes in. I'll mention to him as I'm leavin' that you're in charge. Probably I'll be back before time for the next blow-off. All you gotta do is just be manager — that's all; and if anybody comes round askin' for the manager, you're him. See?"

His impetuosity was hypnotising — it was converting; nay, compelling. It was enough to sweep any audience off its feet, let alone an audience of one. Besides, where lives the male adult between the ages of nine and ninety who in his own mind

is not convinced that he has within him the making of a great and successful amusement purveyor? Still, Gash Tuttle hesitated. The prospect was alluring, but it was sudden — so sudden.

As though divining his mental processes, the man Fornaro added a clinching and a convincing argument.

"To prove I'm on the dead level with you, I'm goin' to pay you for your time — pay you now, in advance — to bind the bargain until we git the details all fixed up." He hauled out a fair-sized wad of currency and from the mass detached a frayed green bill. "I'm goin' to slip you a she-note on the spot."

"A which?"

"A she-note — two bones. See?"

He forced the money into the other's palm. As Gash Tuttle automatically pocketed the retainer he became aware that this brisk new associate of his, without waiting for any further token of agreement on his part, already was preparing to surrender the enterprise into his keeping. Fornaro backed away from him and dropped nimbly down off the back of the platform where there was a slit in the canvas wall; then turned and, standing on tiptoe to bring his mouth above the level of the planking, spoke the parting admonition in hasty tones:

"Remember now, you're the boss, the main guy, the whole cheese! If anybody asts you tell 'em you're the manager and stick to it."

The canvas flapped behind him and he was gone. And Gash Tuttle, filled with conflicting emotions in which reawakened pride predominated, stood alone in his new-found kingdom.

Not for long was he alone, however. To be exact, not for more than half a minute at the very most. He heard what he might have heard before had his ears been as keenly attuned as the vanished Fornaro's were. He heard, just outside, voices

lifted conflictly in demand, in expostulation, in profane protest and equally profane denunciation of something or other. A voice which seemed to be that of the swarthy man denominated as Crummy gave utterance to a howl, then instantly dimmed out, as though its owner was moving or being moved from the immediate vicinity with unseemly celerity and despatch. Feet drummed on the wooden steps beyond the draperies. Something heavy overturned or was overthrown with a crash.

And as Mr. Tuttle, startled by these unseemly demonstrations, started toward the front entrance of his domain the curtain was yanked violently aside and a living tidal wave flowed in on him, dashing high and wide. On its crest, propelled by irresistible cosmic forces, rode, as it were, a slouch-hatted man with a nickel-plated badge on his bosom, and at this person's side was a lanky countryman of a most threatening demeanour; and behind them and beyond them came a surging sea of faces — some hostile, some curious, and all excited.

"Who's in charge here?" shouted the bebadged man.

"Me — I am," began Gash Tuttle. "I'm the manager. What's wanted?"

"You are! I 'rest you in the name of the law for runnin' a skin game!" the constable whooped gleefully — "on a warrant swore out less 'en a hour ago."

And with these astounding words he fixed his fingers, grapple-hook fashion, in the new manager's coat; so that as Gash Tuttle, obeying a primal impulse, tried to back away from him, the back breadth of the coat bunched forward over his head, giving him the appearance of a fawn-coloured turtle trying to retreat within its own shell. His arms, hampered by sleeves pulled far down over the hands, winnowed the air like saurian flippers, wagging in vain resistance.

Holding him fast, ignoring his muffled and inarticulate protests, the constable addressed the menacing countryman:

"Is this one here the one got your money?"

"No, 'tain't. 'Twas a big ugly feller, with mushtashes; but I reckon this here one must've helped. Lemme search him."

"Hands off the prisoner!" ordered the constable, endeavouring to interpose his bulk between maddened accuser and wriggling captive.

He spoke too late and moved too slowly. The countryman's hands dived into Mr. Tuttle's various pockets and were speedily out again in the open; and one of them held money in it — paper and silver.

"Here 'tis!" barked the countryman, exultant now. "This here two-dollar bill is mine — I know it by this here red-ink mark." He shuffled out the three remaining bills and stared at them a moment in stupefaction, and his yelp of joy turned to a bellow of agonised berserk rage. "I had two hundred and twenty-eight dollars in cash, and here ain't but seventeen dollars and sixty cents! You derved sharper! Where's the rest of my mortgage money that yore gang beat me out of?"

He swung a fearsome flail of an arm and full in Gash Tuttle's chest he landed a blow so well aimed, so vigorous, that by its force the recipient was driven backward out of his coat, leaving the emptied garment in the constable's clutches; was driven still further back until he tottered on the rear edge of the platform and tumbled off into space, his body tearing away a width of canvas wall and taking it along with him as he disappeared.

Perhaps it was because he fell so hard that he bounced up so instantaneously. He fought himself free of the smothering folds of dusty tarpaulin and turned to flee headlong into the darkness. He took three flying steps and tripped over the guy rope of the next tent. As he fell with stunning violence

into the protecting shadows he heard pursuit roll over the platform past Osay, thud on the earth, clatter on by him and die away in the distance to the accompaniment of cheers, whoops, and the bloodthirsty threats of the despoiled countryman.

If one has never stolen a ride on a freight train the task presents difficulties and dangers. Still, it may be done, provided one is sufficiently hard pressed to dare its risks and risk its discomforts. There is one especially disagreeable feature incident to the experience — sooner or later discovery is practically inevitable.

Discovery in this instance came just before the dawn, as the freight lumbered through the swampy bottoms of Obion Creek. A sleepy and therefore irritable brakeman found, huddled up on the floor of an empty furniture car, a dark heap, which, on being stirred with a heavy boot-toe, moved and moaned and gave forth various other faint signs of life. So, as the locomotive slowed down for the approach to the trestle, he hoisted the unresisting object and with callous unconcern shoved it out of the open car door on to the sloping bank of the built-up right of way — all this occurring at a point just beyond where a white marker post gleamed spectrally in the strengthening light of the young summer day, bearing on its planed face the symbol, S-3 — meaning by that, three miles to Swango Junction.

At sunup, forty minutes later, a forlorn and shrunken figure, shirt-sleeved, hatless and carrying no baggage whatsoever, quit the crossties and, turning to the left from the railroad track some rods above the station, entered, with weary gait, a byway leading over the hill to the town beyond. There was a drooping in the shoulders and a dragging of the mud-



incrusted legs, and the head, like Old Black Joe's, was bending low.

The lone pedestrian entered the confines of Swango proper, seeking, even at that early hour, such backways as seemed most likely to be empty of human life. But as he lifted his leaden feet past the Philpotts place, which was the most outlying of local domiciles, luck would have it that Mr. Abram Philpotts should be up and stirring; in fact, Mr. Philpotts, being engaged in the milk and butter business, was out in his barn hitching a horse to a wagon. Chancing to pass a window of the barn he glanced out and saw a lolled head bobbing by above the top of his back fence.

"Hey there!" he called out. "Hey, Gash, what air you doin' up so early in the mornin'?"

With a wan suggestion of the old familiar sprightliness the answer came back, comically evasive:

"That's fur me to know and fur you to find out!"

Overcome, Mr. Philpotts fell up against his stable wall, feebly slapping himself on the legs with both hands.

"Same old Gashney!" he gurgled. "They can't nobody ever git ahead of you, kin they, boy?"

The words and the intent of the tribute reached beyond the palings. Their effect was magical; for the ruler was in his realm again, back among his loyal, worshipful subjects. The bare head straightened; the wearied legs unkinked; the crushed and bruised spirit revived. And Gashney Tuttle, king of jesters, re-crowned, proceeded jauntily on his homeward way, with the wholesome plaudits of Mr. Philpotts ringing in his gratified ears and the young sun shining, golden, in his face.

## THE LAGOON <sup>1</sup>

By JOSEPH CONRAD

THE white man, leaning with both arms over the roof of the little house in the stern of the boat, said to the steersman —

“We will pass the night in Arsat’s clearing. It is late.”

The Malay only grunted, and went on looking fixedly at the river. The white man rested his chin on his crossed arms and gazed at the wake of the boat. At the end of the straight avenue of forests cut by the intense glitter of the river, the sun appeared unclouded and dazzling, poised low over the water that shone smoothly like a band of metal. The forests, sombre and dull, stood motionless and silent on each side of the broad stream. At the foot of big, towering trees, trunkless nipa palms rose from the mud of the bank, in bunches of leaves enormous and heavy, that hung unstirring over the brown swirl of eddies. In the stillness of the air every tree, every leaf, every bough, every tendril of creeper and every petal of minute blossoms seemed to have been bewitched into an immobility perfect and final. Nothing moved on the river but the eight paddles that rose flashing regularly, dipped together with a single splash; while the steersman swept right and left with a periodic and sudden flourish of his blade describing a glinting semicircle above his head. The churned-up water frothed alongside with a confused murmur. And the white man’s canoe, advancing up stream in the short-lived disturbance of its own making, seemed to enter the portals of

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a land from which the very memory of motion had for ever departed.

The white man, turning his back upon the setting sun, looked along the empty and broad expanse of the sea-reach. For the last three miles of its course the wandering, hesitating river, as if enticed irresistibly by the freedom of an open horizon, flows straight into the sea, flows straight to the east — to the east that harbours both light and darkness. Astern of the boat the repeated call of some bird, a cry discordant and feeble, skipped along over the smooth water and lost itself, before it could reach the other shore, in the breathless silence of the world.

The steersman dug his paddle into the stream, and held hard with stiffened arms, his body thrown forward. The water gurgled aloud; and suddenly the long straight reach seemed to pivot on its centre, the forests swung in a semicircle, and the slanting beams of sunset touched the broadside of the canoe with a fiery glow, throwing the slender and distorted shadows of its crew upon the streaked glitter of the river. The white man turned to look ahead. The course of the boat had been altered at right-angles to the stream, and the carved dragon-head of its prow was pointing now at a gap in the fringing bushes of the bank. It glided through, brushing the over-hanging twigs, and disappeared from the river like some slim and amphibious creature leaving the water for its lair in the forests.

The narrow creek was like a ditch: tortuous, fabulously deep; filled with gloom under the thin strip of pure and shining blue of the heaven. Immense trees soared up, invisible behind the festooned draperies of creepers. Here and there, near the glistening blackness of the water, a twisted root of some tall tree showed amongst the tracery of small ferns, black and dull,

writhing and motionless, like an arrested snake. The short words of the paddlers reverberated loudly between the thick and sombre walls of vegetation. Darkness oozed out from between the trees, through the tangled maze of the creepers, from behind the great fantastic and unstirring leaves; the darkness, mysterious and invincible; the darkness scented and poisonous of impenetrable forests.

The men poled in the shoaling water. The creek broadened, opening out into a wide sweep of a stagnant lagoon. The forests receded from the marshy bank, leaving a level strip of bright green, reedy grass to frame the reflected blueness of the sky. A fleecy pink cloud drifted high above, trailing the delicate colouring of its image under the floating leaves and the silvery blossoms of the lotus. A little house, perched on high piles, appeared black in the distance. Near it, two tall nibong palms, that seemed to have come out of the forests in the background, leaned slightly over the ragged roof, with a suggestion of sad tenderness and care in the droop of their leafy and soaring heads.

The steersman, pointing with his paddle, said, "Arsat is there. I see his canoe fast between the piles."

The polers ran along the sides of the boat glancing over their shoulders at the end of the day's journey. They would have preferred to spend the night somewhere else than on this lagoon of weird aspect and ghostly reputation. Moreover, they disliked Arsat, first as a stranger, and also because he who repairs a ruined house and dwells in it, proclaims that he is not afraid to live amongst the spirits that haunt the places abandoned by mankind. Such a man can disturb the course of fate by glances or words; while his familiar ghosts are not easy to propitiate by casual wayfarers upon whom they long to wreak the malice of their human master. White men care

not for such things, being unbelievers and in league with the Father of Evil, who leads them unharmed through the invisible dangers of this world. To the warnings of the righteous they oppose an offensive pretence of disbelief. What is there to be done?

So they thought, throwing their weight on the end of their long poles. The big canoe glided on swiftly, noiselessly, and smoothly, towards Arsat's clearing, till, in a great rattling of poles thrown down, and the loud murmurs of "Allah be praised!" it came with a gentle knock against the crooked piles below the house.

The boatmen with uplifted faces shouted discordantly, "Arsat! O Arsat!" Nobody came. The white man began to climb the rude ladder giving access to the bamboo platform before the house. The juragan of the boat said sulkily, "We will cook in the sampan, and sleep on the water."

"Pass my blankets and the basket," said the white man curtly.

He knelt on the edge of the platform to receive the bundle. Then the boat shoved off, and the white man, standing up, confronted Arsat, who had come out through the low door of his hut. He was a man young, powerful, with a broad chest and muscular arms. He had nothing on but his sarong. His head was bare. His big, soft eyes stared eagerly at the white man, but his voice and demeanour were composed as he asked, without any words of greeting —

"Have you medicine, Tuan?"

"No," said the visitor in a startled tone. "No. Why? Is there sickness in the house?"

"Enter and see," replied Arsat, in the same calm manner, and turning short round, passed again through the small doorway. The white man, dropping his bundles, followed.



In the dim light of the dwelling he made out on a couch of bamboos a woman stretched on her back under a broad sheet of red cotton cloth. She lay still, as if dead; but her big eyes, wide open, glittered in the gloom, staring upwards at the slender rafters, motionless and unseeing. She was in a high fever, and evidently unconscious. Her cheeks were sunk slightly, her lips were partly open, and on the young face there was the ominous and fixed expression — the absorbed, contemplating expression of the unconscious who are going to die. The two men stood looking down at her in silence.

“Has she been long ill?” asked the traveller.

“I have not slept for five nights,” answered the Malay, in a deliberate tone. “At first she heard voices calling her from the water and struggled against me who held her. But since the sun of to-day rose she hears nothing — she hears not me. She sees nothing. She sees not me — me!”

He remained silent for a minute, then asked softly —

“Tuan, will she die?”

“I fear so,” said the white man sorrowfully. He had known Arsat years ago, in a far country in times of trouble and danger, when no friendship is to be despised. And since his Malay friend had come unexpectedly to dwell in the hut on the lagoon with a strange woman, he had slept many times there, in his journeys up and down the river. He liked the man who knew how to keep faith in council and how to fight without fear by the side of his white friend. He liked him — not so much perhaps as a man likes his favourite dog — but still he liked him well enough to help and ask no questions, to think sometimes vaguely and hazily in the midst of his own pursuits, about the lonely man and the long-haired woman with audacious face and triumphant eyes, who lived together hidden by the forests — alone and feared.

The white man came out of the hut in time to see the enormous conflagration of sunset put out by the swift and stealthy shadows that, rising like a black and impalpable vapour above the tree-tops, spread over the heaven, extinguishing the crimson glow of floating clouds and the red brilliance of departing daylight. In a few moments all the stars came out above the intense blackness of the earth, and the great lagoon gleaming suddenly with reflected lights resembled an oval patch of night sky flung down into the hopeless and abysmal night of the wilderness. The white man had some supper out of the basket, then collecting a few sticks that lay about the platform, made up a small fire, not for warmth, but for the sake of the smoke, which would keep off the mosquitos. He wrapped himself in his blankets and sat with his back against the reed wall of the house, smoking thoughtfully.

Arsat came through the doorway with noiseless steps and squatted down by the fire. The white man moved his outstretched legs a little.

"She breathes," said Arsat in a low voice, anticipating the expected question. "She breathes and burns as if with a great fire. She speaks not; she hears not — and burns!"

He paused for a moment, then asked in a quiet, incurious tone —

"Tuan . . . will she die?"

The white man moved his shoulders uneasily, and muttered in a hesitating manner —

"If such is her fate."

"No, Tuan," said Arsat calmly. "If such is my fate. I hear, I see, I wait. I remember . . . Tuan, do you remember the old days? Do you remember my brother?"

"Yes," said the white man. The Malay rose suddenly and went in. The other, sitting still outside, could hear the voice

in the hut. Arsat said: "Hear me! Speak!" His words were succeeded by a complete silence. "O Diamelen!" he cried suddenly. After that cry there was a deep sigh. Arsat came out and sank down again in his old place.

They sat in silence before the fire. There was no sound within the house, there was no sound near them; but far away on the lagoon they could hear the voices of the boatmen ringing fitful and distinct on the calm water. The fire in the bows of the sampan shone faintly in the distance with a hazy red glow. Then it died out. The voices ceased. The land and the water slept invisible, unstirring and mute. It was as though there had been nothing left in the world but the glitter of stars streaming, ceaseless and vain, through the black stillness of the night.

The white man gazed straight before him into the darkness with wide-open eyes. The fear and fascination, the inspiration and the wonder of death — of death near, unavoidable, and unseen, soothed the unrest of his race and stirred the most indistinct, the most intimate of his thoughts. The ever-ready suspicion of evil, the gnawing suspicion that lurks in our hearts, flowed out into the stillness round him — into the stillness profound and dumb, and made it appear untrustworthy and infamous, like the placid and impenetrable mask of an unjustifiable violence. In that fleeting and powerful disturbance of his being the earth enfolded in the starlight peace became a shadowy country of inhuman strife, a battle-field of phantoms, terrible and charming, august or ignoble, struggling ardently for the possession of our helpless hearts. An unquiet and mysterious country of inextinguishable desires and fears.

A plaintive murmur rose in the night; a murmur saddening and startling, as if the great solitudes of surrounding woods had tried to whisper into his ear the wisdom of their immense

and lofty indifference. Sounds hesitating and vague floated in the air round him, shaped themselves slowly into words; and at last flowed on gently in a murmuring stream of soft and monotonous sentences. He stirred like a man waking up and changed his position slightly. Arsat, motionless and shadowy, sitting with bowed head under the stars, was speaking in a low and dreamy tone —

“... for where can we lay down the heaviness of our trouble but in a friend's heart? A man must speak of war and of love. You, Tuan, know what war is, and you have seen me in time of danger seek death as other men seek life! A writing may be lost; a lie may be written; but what the eye has seen is truth and remains in the mind!”

“I remember,” said the white man quietly. Arsat went on with mournful composure —

“Therefore I shall speak to you of love. Speak in the night. Speak before both night and love are gone — and the eye of day looks upon my sorrow and my shame; upon my blackened face; upon my burnt-up heart.”

A sigh, short and faint, marked an almost imperceptible pause, and then his words flowed on, without a stir, without a gesture.

“After the time of trouble and war was over and you went away from my country in the pursuit of your desires, which we, men of the islands cannot understand, I and my brother became again, as we had been before, the sword-bearers of the Ruler. You know we were men of family, belonging to a ruling race, and more fit than any to carry on our right shoulder the emblem of power. And in the time of prosperity Si Dendring showed us favour, as we, in time of sorrow, had showed to him the faithfulness of our courage. It was a time of peace. A time of deer-hunts and cock-fights; of idle talks and foolish

squabbles between men whose bellies are full and weapons are rusty. But the sower watched the young rice-shoots grow up without fear, and the traders came and went, departed lean and returned fat into the river of peace. They brought news too. Brought lies and truth mixed together, so that no man knew when to rejoice and when to be sorry. We heard from them about you also. They had seen you here and had seen you there. And I was glad to hear, for I remembered the stirring times, and I always remembered you, Tuan, till the time came when my eyes could see nothing in the past, because they had looked upon the one who is dying there — in the house."

He stopped to exclaim in an intense whisper, "O Mara bahia! O Calamity!" then went on speaking a little louder.

"There's no worse enemy and no better friend than a brother, Tuan, for one brother knows another, and in perfect knowledge is strength for good or evil. I loved my brother. I went to him and told him that I could see nothing but one face, hear nothing but one voice. He told me: 'Open your heart so that she can see what is in it — and wait. Patience is wisdom. Inchi Midah may die or our Ruler may throw off his fear of a woman!' . . . I waited! . . . You remember the lady with the veiled face, Tuan, and the fear of our Ruler before her cunning and temper. And if she wanted her servant, what could I do? But I fed the hunger of my heart on short glances and stealthy words. I loitered on the path to the bath-houses in the daytime, and when the sun had fallen behind the forest I crept along the jasmine hedges of the women's courtyard. Unseeing, we spoke to one another through the scent of flowers, through the veil of leaves, through the blades of long grass that stood still before our lips; so great was our prudence, so faint was the murmur of our great longing. The time passed swiftly



...and there were whispers amongst women — and our enemies watched — my brother was gloomy, and I began to think of killing and of a fierce death. . . . We are of a people who take what they want — like you whites. There is a time when a man should forget loyalty and respect. Might and authority are given to rulers, but to all men is given love and strength and courage. My brother said, 'You shall take her from their midst. We are two who are like one.' And I answered, 'Let it be soon, for I find no warmth in sunlight that does not shine upon her.' Our time came when the Ruler and all the great people went to the mouth of the river to fish by torchlight. There were hundreds of boats, and on the white sand, between the water and the forests, dwellings of leaves were built for the households of the Rajahs. The smoke of cooking-fires was like a blue mist of the evening, and many voices rang in it joyfully. While they were making the boats ready to beat up the fish, my brother came to me and said, 'To-night!' I looked to my weapons, and when the time came our canoe took its place in the circle of boats carrying the torches. The lights blazed on the water, but behind the boats there was darkness. When the shouting began and the excitement made them like mad we dropped out. The water swallowed our fire and we floated back to the shore that was dark with only here and there the glimmer of embers. We could hear the talk of slave-girls amongst the sheds. Then we found a place deserted and silent. We waited there. She came. She came running along the shore, rapid and leaving no trace, like a leaf driven by the wind into the sea. My brother said gloomily, 'Go and take her; carry her into our boat.' I lifted her in my arms. She panted. Her heart was beating against my breast. I said, 'I take you from those people. You came to the cry of my heart, but my arms take

you into my boat against the will of the great!’ ‘It is right,’ said my brother. ‘We are men who take what we want and can hold it against many. We should have taken her in daylight.’ I said, ‘Let us be off’; for since she was in my boat I began to think of our Ruler’s many men. ‘Yes. Let us be off,’ said my brother. ‘We are cast out and this boat is our country now — and the sea is our refuge.’ He lingered with his foot on the shore, and I entreated him to hasten, for I remembered the strokes of her heart against my breast and thought that two men cannot withstand a hundred. We left, paddling downstream close to the bank; and as we passed by the creek where they were fishing, the great shouting had ceased, but the murmur of voices was loud like the humming of insects flying at noonday. The boats floated, clustered together, in the red light of torches, under a black roof of smoke; and men talked of their sport. Men that boasted, and praised, and jeered — men that would have been our friends in the morning, but on that night were already our enemies. We paddled swiftly past. We had no more friends in the country of our birth. She sat in the middle of the canoe with covered face; silent as she is now; unseeing as she is now — and I had no regret at what I was leaving because I could hear her breathing close to me — as I can hear her now.”

He paused, listened with his ear turned to the doorway, then shook his head and went on.

“My brother wanted to shout the cry of challenge — one cry only — to let the people know we were freeborn robbers who trusted our arms and the great sea. And again I begged him in the name of our love to be silent. Could I not hear her breathing close to me? I knew the pursuit would come quick enough. My brother loved me. He dipped his paddle without a splash. He only said, ‘There is half a man in you now —

the other half is in that woman. I can wait. When you are a whole man again, you will come back with me here to shout defiance. We are sons of the same mother.' I made no answer. All my strength and all my spirit were in my hands that held the paddle — for I longed to be with her in a safe place beyond the reach of men's anger and of women's spite. My love was so great, that I thought it could guide me to a country where death was unknown, if I could only escape from Inchi Midah's fury and from our Ruler's sword. We paddled with haste, breathing through our teeth. The blades bit deep into the smooth water. We passed out of the river; we flew in clear channels amongst the shallows. We skirted the black coast; we skirted the sand beaches where the sea speaks in whispers to the land; and the gleam of white sand flashed back past our boat, so swiftly she ran upon the water. We spoke not. Only once I said, 'Sleep, Diamelen, for soon you may want all your strength.' I heard the sweetness of her voice, but I never turned my head. The sun rose and still we went on. Water fell from my face like rain from a cloud. We flew in the light and heat. I never looked back, but I knew that my brother's eyes, behind me, were looking steadily ahead, for the boat went as straight as a bushman's dart, when it leaves the end of the sumpitan. There was no better paddler, no better steersman than my brother. Many times, together, we had won races in that canoe. But we never had put out our strength as we did then — then, when for the last time we paddled together! There was no braver or stronger man in our country than my brother. I could not spare the strength to turn my head and look at him, but every moment I heard the hiss of his breath getting louder behind me. Still he did not speak. The sun was high. The heat clung to my back like a flame of fire. My ribs were ready to burst, but I could no

longer get enough air into my chest. And then I felt I must cry out with my last breath, 'Let us rest!' . . . 'Good!' he answered; and his voice was firm. He was strong. He was brave. He knew not fear and no fatigue . . . My brother!"

A murmur powerful and gentle, a murmur vast and faint; the murmur of trembling leaves, of stirring boughs, ran through the tangled depths of the forests, ran over the starry smoothness of the lagoon, and the water between the piles lapped the slimy timber once with a sudden splash. A breath of warm air touched the two men's faces and passed on with a mournful sound — a breath loud and short like an uneasy sigh of the dreaming earth.

Arsat went on in an even, low voice.

"We ran our canoe on the white beach of a little bay close to a long tongue of land that seemed to bar our road; a long wooded cape going far into the sea. My brother knew that place. Beyond the cape a river has its entrance, and through the jungle of that land there is a narrow path. We made a fire and cooked rice. Then we lay down to sleep on the soft sand in the shade of our canoe, while she watched. No sooner had I closed my eyes than I heard her cry of alarm. We leaped up. The sun was halfway down the sky already, and coming in sight in the opening of the bay we saw a prau manned by many paddlers. We knew it at once; it was one of our Rajah's praus. They were watching the shore, and saw us. They beat the gong, and turned the head of the prau into the bay. I felt my heart become weak within my breast. Diamelen sat on the sand and covered her face. There was no escape by sea. My brother laughed. He had the gun you had given him, Tuan, before you went away, but there was only a handful of powder. He spoke to me quickly: 'Run with her along the path. I shall keep them back, for they have no firearms, and landing

in the face of a man with a gun is certain death for some. Run with her. On the other side of that wood there is a fisherman's house — and a canoe. When I have fired all the shots I will follow. I am a great runner, and before they can come up we shall be gone. I will hold out as long as I can, for she is but a woman — that can neither run nor fight, but she has your heart in her weak hands.' He dropped behind the canoe. The prau was coming. She and I ran, and as we rushed along the path I heard shots. My brother fired — once — twice — and the booming of the gong ceased. There was silence behind us. That neck of land is narrow. Before I heard my brother fire the third shot I saw the shelving shore, and I saw the water again, the mouth of a broad river. We crossed a grassy glade. We ran down to the water. I saw a low hut above the black mud, and a small canoe hauled up. I heard another shot behind me. I thought, 'That is his last charge.' We rushed down to the canoe; a man came running from the hut, but I leaped on him, and we rolled together in the mud. Then I got up, and he lay still at my feet. I don't know whether I had killed him or not. I and Diamelen pushed the canoe afloat. I heard yells behind me, and I saw my brother run across the glade. Many men were bounding after him, I took her in my arms and threw her into the boat, then leaped in myself. When I looked back I saw that my brother had fallen. He fell and was up again, but the men were closing round him. He shouted, 'I am coming!' The men were close to him. I looked. Many men. Then I looked at her. Tuan, I pushed the canoe! I pushed it into deep water. She was kneeling forward looking at me, and I said, 'Take your paddle,' while I struck the water with mine. Tuan, I heard him cry. I heard him cry my name twice, and I heard voices shouting, 'Kill! Strike!' I never turned back. I heard him calling my name again with a great



shriek, as when life is going out together with the voice — and I never turned my head. My own name! . . . My brother! Three times he called — but I was not afraid of life. Was she not there in that canoe? And could I not with her find a country where death is forgotten — where death is unknown!”

The white man sat up. Arsat rose and stood, an indistinct and silent figure above the dying embers of the fire. Over the lagoon a mist drifting and low had crept, erasing slowly the glittering images of the stars. And now a great expanse of white vapour covered the land: it flowed cold and grey in the darkness, eddied in noiseless whirls round the tree-trunks and about the platform of the house, which seemed to float upon a restless and impalpable illusion of a sea. Only far away the tops of the trees stood outlined on the twinkle of heaven, like a sombre and forbidding shore — a coast deceptive, pitiless, and black.

Arsat's voice vibrated loudly in the profound peace.

“I had her there! I had her! To get her I would have faced all mankind. But I had her — and —”

His words went out ringing into the empty distances. He paused, and seemed to listen to them dying away very far — beyond help and beyond recall. Then he said quietly —

“Tuan, I loved my brother.”

A breath of wind made him shiver. High above his head, high above the silent sea of mist the drooping leaves of the palms rattled together with a mournful and expiring sound. The white man stretched his legs. His chin rested on his chest, and he murmured sadly without lifting his head —

“We all love our brothers.”

Arsat burst out with an intense whispering violence —

“What did I care who died? I wanted peace in my own heart.”

He seemed to hear a stir in the house — listened — then stepped in noiselessly. The white man stood up. A breeze was coming in fitful puffs. The stars shone paler as if they had retreated into the frozen depths of immense space. After a chill gust of wind there were a few seconds of perfect calm and absolute silence. Then from behind the black and wavy line of the forests a column of golden light shot up into the heavens and spread over the semi-circle of the eastern horizon. The sun had risen. The mist lifted, broke into drifting patches, vanished into thin flying wreaths; and the unveiled lagoon lay, polished and black, in the heavy shadows at the foot of the wall of trees. A white eagle rose over it with a slanting and ponderous flight, reached the clear sunshine and appeared dazzlingly brilliant for a moment, then soaring higher, became a dark and motionless speck before it vanished into the blue as if it had left the earth for ever. The white man, standing gazing upwards before the doorway, heard in the hut a confused and broken murmur of distracted words ending with a loud groan. Suddenly Arsat stumbled out with outstretched hands, shivered, and stood still for some time with fixed eyes. Then he said —

“She burns no more.”

Before his face the sun showed its edge above the tree-tops, rising steadily. The breeze freshened; a great brilliance burst upon the lagoon, sparkled on the rippling water. The forests came out of the clear shadows of the morning, became distinct, as if they had rushed nearer — to stop short in a great stir of leaves, of nodding boughs, of swaying branches. In the merciless sunshine the whisper of unconscious life grew louder, speaking in an incomprehensible voice round the dumb darkness of that human sorrow. Arsat’s eyes wandered slowly, then stared at the rising sun.

"I can see nothing," he said half aloud to himself.

"There is nothing," said the white man, moving to the edge of the platform and waving his hand to his boat. A shout came faintly over the lagoon and the sampan began to glide towards the abode of the friend of ghosts.

"If you want to come with me, I will wait all the morning," said the white man, looking away upon the water.

"No, Tuan," said Arsath softly. "I shall not eat or sleep in this house, but I must first see my road. Now I can see nothing — see nothing! There is no light and no peace in the world; but there is death — death for many. We were sons of the same mother — and I left him in the midst of enemies; but I am going back now."

He drew a long breath and went on in a dreamy tone.

"In a little while I shall see clear enough to strike — to strike. But she has died, and . . . now . . . darkness."

He flung his arms wide open, let them fall along his body, then stood still with unmoved face and stony eyes, staring at the sun. The white man got down into his canoe. The polers ran smartly along the sides of the boat, looking over their shoulders at the beginning of a weary journey. High in the stern, his head muffled up in white rags, the juragan sat moody, letting his paddle trail in the water. The white man, leaning with both arms over the grass roof of the little cabin, looked back at the shining ripple of the boat's wake. Before the sampan passed out of the lagoon into the creek he lifted his eyes. Arsath had not moved. He stood lonely in the searching sunshine; and he looked beyond the great light of a cloudless day into the darkness of a world of illusions.

## THE SECOND CHOICE<sup>1</sup>

By THEODORE DREISER

SHIRLEY DEAR:

You don't want the letters. There are only six of them, anyhow, and think, they're all I have of you to cheer me on my travels. What good would they be to you — little bits of notes telling me you're sure to meet me — but me — think of me! If I send them to you, you'll tear them up, whereas if you leave them with me I can dab them with musk and ambergris and keep them in a little silver box, always beside me.

Ah, Shirley dear, you really don't know how sweet I think you are, how dear! There isn't a thing we have ever done together that isn't as clear in my mind as this great big skyscraper over the way here in Pittsburgh, and far more pleasing. In fact, my thoughts of you are the most precious and delicious things I have, Shirley.

But I'm too young to marry now. You know that, Shirley, don't you? I haven't placed myself in any way yet, and I'm so restless that I don't know whether I ever will, really. Only yesterday, old Roxbaum — that's my new employer here — came to me and wanted to know if I would like an assistant overseership on one of his coffee plantations in Java, said there would not be much money in it for a year or two, a bare living, but later there would be more — and I jumped at it. Just the thought of Java and going there did that, although I knew I could make more staying right here. Can't you see how it is

<sup>1</sup> From *Free and Other Stories*, by Theodore Dreiser. Copyright, 1918, by Boni and Liveright, Inc. Reprinted by special permission of the author and the publishers.

with me Shirl? I'm too restless and too young. I couldn't take care of you right, and you wouldn't like me after a while if I didn't.

But ah, Shirley sweet, I think the dearest things of you! There isn't an hour, it seems, but some little bit of you comes back — a dear, sweet bit — the night we sat on the grass in Tregore Park and counted the stars through the trees; that first evening at Sparrows Point when we missed the last train and had to walk to Langley. Remember the tree-toads, Shirl? And then that warm April Sunday in Atholby woods! Ah, Shirl, you don't want the six notes! Let me keep them. But think of me, will you, sweet, wherever you go and whatever you do? I'll always think of you, and wish that you had met a better, saner man than me, and that I really could have married you and been all you wanted me to be. By-by, sweet. I may start for Java within the month. If so, and you would want them, I'll send you some cards from there — if they have any.

Your worthless

ARTHUR.

She sat and turned the letter in her hand, dumb with despair. It was the very last letter she would ever get from him. Of that she was certain. He was gone now, once and for all. She had written him only once, not making an open plea but asking him to return her letters, and then there had come this tender but evasive reply, saying nothing of a possible return but desiring to keep her letters for old times' sake — the happy hours they had spent together.

The happy hours! Oh, yes, yes, yes — the happy hours!

In her memory now, as she sat here in her home after the day's work, meditating on all that had been in the few short



months since he had come and gone, was a world of color and light — a color and light so transfiguring as to seem celestial, but now, alas, wholly dissipated. It had contained so much of all she had desired — love, romance, amusement, laughter. He had been so gay and thoughtless, or headstrong, so youthfully romantic, and with such a love of play and change and to be saying and doing anything and everything. Arthur could dance in a gay way, whistle, sing after a fashion, play. He could play cards and do tricks, and he had such a superior air, so genial and brisk, with a kind of innate courtesy in it and yet an intolerance for slowness and stodginess or anything dull or dingy, such as characterized — But here her thoughts fled from him. She refused to think of any one but Arthur.

Sitting in her little bedroom now, off the parlor on the ground floor in her home in Bethune Street, and looking out over the Kessels' yard, and beyond that — there being no fences in Bethune Street — over the "yards" or lawns of the Pollards, Bakers, Cryders, and others, she thought of how dull it must all have seemed to him, with his fine imaginative mind and experiences, his love of change and gaiety, his atmosphere of something better than she had ever known. How little she had been fitted, perhaps, by beauty or temperament to overcome this — the something — dullness in her work or her home, which possibly had driven him away. For, although many had admired her to date, and she was young and pretty in her simple way and constantly receiving suggestions that her beauty was disturbing to some, still, he had not cared for her — he had gone.

And now, as she meditated, it seemed that this scene, and all that it stood for — her parents, her work, her daily shuttling to and fro between the drug company for which she worked and this street and house — was typical of her life

and what she was destined to endure always. Some girls were so much more fortunate. They had fine clothes, fine homes, a world of pleasure and opportunity in which to move. They did not have to scrimp and save and work to pay their own way. And yet she had always been compelled to do it, but had never complained until now — or until he came, and after. Bethune Street, with its commonplace front yards and houses nearly all alike, and this house, so like the others, room for room and porch for porch, and her parents, too, really like all the others, had seemed good enough, quite satisfactory, indeed, until then. But now, now!

Here, in their kitchen, was her mother, a thin, pale, but kindly woman, peeling potatoes and washing lettuce, and putting a bit of steak or a chop or a piece of liver in a frying pan day after day, morning and evening, month after month, year after year. And next door was Mrs. Kessel doing the same thing. And next door Mrs. Cryder. And next door Mrs. Pollard. But, until now, she had not thought it so bad. But now — now — oh! And on all the porches or lawns all along this street were the husbands and fathers, mostly middle-aged or old men like her father, reading their papers or cutting the grass before dinner, or smoking and meditating afterward. Her father was out in front now, a stooped, forbearing, meditative soul, who had rarely anything to say — leaving it all to his wife, her mother, but who was fond of her in his dull, quiet way. He was a pattern-maker by trade, and had come into possession of this small, ordinary home via years of toil and saving, her mother helping him. They had no particular religion, as he often said, thinking reasonably human conduct a sufficient passport to heaven, but they had gone occasionally to the Methodist Church over in Nicholas Street, and she had once joined it. But of late she had not gone, weaned away by the other commonplace pleasures of her world.

And then in the midst of it, the dull drift of things, as she now saw them to be, he had come — Arthur Bristow — young, energetic, good-looking, ambitious, dreamful, and instant, and with her never knowing quite how, the whole thing had been changed. He had appeared so swiftly — out of nothing, as it were.

Previous to him had been Barton Williams, stout, phlegmatic, good-natured, well-meaning, who was, or had been before Arthur came, asking her to marry him, and whom she allowed to half assume that she would. She had liked him in a feeble, albeit, as she thought, tender way, thinking him the kind, according to the logic of her neighborhood, who would make her a good husband, and, until Arthur appeared on the scene, had really intended to marry him. It was not really a love-match, as she saw now, but she thought it was, which was much the same thing, perhaps. But, as she now recalled, when Arthur came, how the scales fell from her eyes! In a trice, as it were, nearly, there was a new heaven and a new earth. Arthur had arrived, and with him a sense of something different.

Mabel Gove had asked her to come over to her house in Westleigh, the adjoining suburb, for Thanksgiving eve and day, and without a thought of anything, and because Barton was busy handling a part of the work in the despatcher's office of the Great Eastern and could not see her, she had gone. And then, to her surprise and strange, almost ineffable delight, the moment she had seen him, he was there — Arthur, with his slim, straight figure and dark hair and eyes and clean-cut features, as clean and attractive as those of a coin. And as he had looked at her and smiled and narrated humorous bits of things that had happened to him, something had come over her — a spell — and after dinner they had all gone round to

Edith Barringer's to dance, and there as she had danced with him, somehow, without any seeming boldness on his part, he had taken possession of her, as it were, drawn her close, and told her she had beautiful eyes and hair and such a delicately rounded chin, and that he thought she danced gracefully and was sweet. She had nearly fainted with delight.

"Do you like me?" he had asked in one place in the dance, and, in spite of herself, she had looked up into his eyes, and from that moment she was almost mad over him, could think of nothing else but his hair and eyes and his smile and his graceful figure.

Mabel Gove had seen it all, in spite of her determination that no one should, and on their going to bed later, back at Mabel's home, she had whispered:

"Ah, Shirley, I saw. You like Arthur, don't you?"

"I think he's very nice," Shirley recalled replying, for Mabel knew of her affair with Barton and liked him, "but I'm not crazy over him." And for this bit of treason she had sighed in her dreams nearly all night.

And the next day, true to a request and a promise made by him, Arthur had called again at Mabel's to take her and Mabel to a "movie" which was not so far away, and from there they had gone to an ice-cream parlor, and during it all, when Mabel was not looking, he had squeezed her arm and hand and kissed her neck, and she had held her breath, and her heart had seemed to stop.

"And now you're going to let me come out to your place to see you, aren't you?" he had whispered.

And she had replied, "Wednesday evening," and then written the address on a little piece of paper and given it to him.

But now it was all gone, gone!

This house, which now looked so dreary — how romantic

it had seemed that first night *he* called — the front room with its commonplace furniture, and later in the spring, the veranda, with its vines just sprouting, and the moon in May. Oh, the moon in May, and June and July, when he was here! How she had lied to Barton to make evenings for Arthur, and occasionally to Arthur to keep him from contact with Barton. She had not even mentioned Barton to Arthur because — because — well, because Arthur was so much better, and somehow (she admitted it to herself now) she had not been sure that Arthur would care for her long, if at all, and then — well, and then, to be quite frank, Barton might be good enough. She did not exactly hate him because she had found Arthur — not at all. She still liked him in a way — he was so kind and faithful, so very dull and straightforward and thoughtful of her, which Arthur was certainly not. Before Arthur had appeared, as she well remembered, Barton had seemed to be plenty good enough — in fact, all that she desired in a pleasant, companionable way, calling for her, taking her places, bringing her flowers and candy, which Arthur rarely did, and for that, if nothing more, she could not help continuing to like him and to feel sorry for him, and, besides, as she had admitted to herself before, if Arthur left her — . . . Weren't his parents better off than hers — and hadn't he a good position for such a man as he — one hundred and fifty dollars a month and the certainty of more later on? A little while before meeting Arthur, she had thought this very good, enough for two to live on at least, and she had thought some of trying it at some time or other — but now — now —

And that first night he had called — how well she remembered it — how it had transfigured the parlor next this in which she was now, filling it with something it had never had before, and the porch outside, too, for that matter, with its



gaunt, leafless vine, and this street, too, even — dull, commonplace Bethune Street. There had been a flurry of snow during the afternoon while she was working at the store, and the ground was white with it. All the neighboring homes seemed to look sweeter and happier and more inviting than ever they had as she came past them, with their lights peeping from under curtains and drawn shades. She had hurried into hers and lighted the big red-shaded parlor lamp, her one artistic treasure, as she thought, and put it near the piano, between it and the window, and arranged the chairs, and then bustled to the task of making herself as pleasing as she might. For him she had gotten out her one best filmy house dress and done up her hair in the fashion she thought most becoming — and that he had not seen before — and powdered her cheeks and nose and darkened her eyelashes, as some of the girls at the store did, and put on her new gray satin slippers, and then, being so arrayed, waited nervously, unable to eat anything or to think of anything but him.

And at last, just when she had begun to think he might not be coming, he had appeared with that arch smile and a "Hello! It's here you live, is it? I was wondering. George, but you're twice as sweet as I thought you were, aren't you?" And then, in the little entryway, behind the closed door, he had held her and kissed her on the mouth a dozen times while she pretended to push against his coat and struggle and say that her parents might hear.

And, oh, the room afterward, with him in it in the red glow of the lamp, and with his pale handsome face made handsomer thereby, as she thought! He had made her sit near him and had held her hands and told her about his work and his dreams — all that he expected to do in the future — and then she had found herself wishing intensely to share just such

a life — his life — anything that he might wish to do; only, she kept wondering, with a slight pain, whether he would want her to — he was so young, dreamful, ambitious, much younger and more dreamful than herself, although, in reality, he was several years older.

And then followed that glorious period from December to this late September, in which everything which was worth happening in love had happened. Oh, those wondrous days the following spring, when, with the first burst of buds and leaves, he had taken her one Sunday to Atholby, where all the great woods were, and they had hunted spring beauties in the grass, and sat on a slope and looked at the river below and watched some boys fixing up a sailboat and setting forth in it quite as she wished she and Arthur might be doing — going somewhere together — far, far away from all commonplace things and life! And then he had slipped his arm about her and kissed her cheek and neck, and tweaked her ear and smoothed her hair — and oh, there on the grass, with the spring flowers about her and a canopy of small green leaves above, the perfection of love had come — love so wonderful that the mere thought of it made her eyes brim now! And then had been days, Saturday afternoons and Sundays, at Atholby and Sparrows Point, where the great beach was, and in lovely Tregore Park, a mile or two from her home, where they could go of an evening and sit in or near the pavilion and have ice-cream and dance or watch the dancers. Oh, the stars, the winds, the summer breath of those days! Ah, me! Ah, me!

Naturally, her parents had wondered from the first about her and Arthur, and her and Barton, since Barton had already assumed a proprietary interest in her and she had seemed to like him. But then she was an only child and a pet, and used to presuming on that, and they could not think of saying any-

thing to her. After all, she was young and pretty and was entitled to change her mind; only, only — she had had to indulge in a career of lying and subterfuge in connection with Barton, since Arthur was headstrong and wanted every evening that he chose — to call for her at the store and keep her down-town to dinner and a show.

Arthur had never been like Barton, shy, phlegmatic, obedient, waiting long and patiently for each little favor, but, instead, masterful and eager, rifling her of kisses and caresses and every delight of love, and teasing and playing with her as a cat would a mouse. She could never resist him. He demanded of her her time and her affection without let or hindrance. He was not exactly selfish or cruel, as some might have been, but gay and unthinking at times, unconsciously so, and yet loving and tender at others — nearly always so. But always he would talk of things in the future as if they really did not include her — and this troubled her greatly — of places he might go, things he might do, which, somehow, he seemed to think or assume that she could not or would not do with him. He was always going to Australia sometime, he thought, in a business way, or to South Africa, or possibly to India. He never seemed to have any fixed clear future for himself in mind.

A dreadful sense of helplessness and of impending disaster came over her at these times, of being involved in some predicament over which she had no control, and which would lead her on to some sad end. Arthur, although plainly in love, as she thought, and apparently delighted with her, might not always love her. She began, timidly at first (and always, for that matter), to ask him pretty, seeking questions about himself and her, whether their future was certain to be together, whether he really wanted her — loved her — whether he

might not want to marry some one else or just her, and whether she wouldn't look nice in a pearl satin wedding-dress with a long creamy veil and satin slippers and a bouquet of bridal-wreath. She had been so slowly but surely saving to that end, even before he came, in connection with Barton; only, after *he* came, all thought of the import of it had been transferred to him. But now, also, she was beginning to ask herself sadly, "Would it ever be?" He was so airy, so inconsequential, so ready to say: "Yes, yes," and "Sure, sure! That's right! Yes, indeedy; you bet! Say, kiddie, but you'll look sweet!" but, somehow, it had always seemed as if this whole thing were a glorious interlude and that it could not last. Arthur was too gay and ethereal and too little settled in his own mind. His ideas of travel and living in different cities, finally winding up in New York or San Francisco, but never with her exactly until she asked him, were too ominous, although he always reassured her gaily: "Of course! Of course!" But somehow she could never believe it really, and it made her intensely sad at times, horribly gloomy. So often she wanted to cry, and she could scarcely tell why.

And then, because of her affection for him, she had finally quarreled with Barton, or nearly that, if one could say that one ever really quarreled with him. It had been because of a certain Thursday evening a few weeks before about which she had disappointed him. In a fit of generosity, knowing that Arthur was coming Wednesday, and because Barton had stopped in at the store to see her, she had told him that he might come, having regretted it afterward, so enamored was she of Arthur. And then when Wednesday came, Arthur had changed his mind, telling her he would come Friday instead, but on Thursday evening he had stopped in at the store and asked her to go to Sparrows Point, with the result that she

had no time to notify Barton. He had gone to the house and sat with her parents until ten-thirty, and then, a few days later, although she had written him offering an excuse, had called at the store to complain slightly.

"Do you think you did just right, Shirley? You might have sent word, mightn't you? Who was it — the new fellow you won't tell me about?"

Shirley flared on the instant.

"Supposing it was? What's it to you? I don't belong to you yet, do I? I told you there wasn't any one, and I wish you'd let me alone about that. I couldn't help it last Thursday — that's all — and I don't want you to be fussing with me — that's all. If you don't want to, you needn't come any more, anyhow."

"Don't say that, Shirley," pleaded Barton. "You don't mean that. I won't bother you, though, if you don't want me any more."

And because Shirley sulked, not knowing what else to do, he had gone and she had not seen him since.

And then sometime later when she had thus broken with Barton, avoiding the railway station where he worked, Arthur had failed to come at his appointed time, sending no word until the next day, when a note came to the store saying that he had been out of town for his firm over Sunday and had not been able to notify her, but that he would call Tuesday. It was an awful blow. At the time, Shirley had a vision of what was to follow. It seemed for the moment as if the whole world had suddenly been reduced to ashes, that there was nothing but black charred cinders anywhere — she felt that about all life. Yet it all came to her clearly then that this was but the beginning of just such days and just such excuses, and that soon, soon, he would come no more. He was beginning to be



tired of her and soon he would not even make excuses. She felt it, and it froze and terrified her.

And then, soon after, the indifference which she feared did follow — almost created by her own thoughts, as it were. First, it was a meeting he had to attend somewhere one Wednesday night when he was to have come for her. Then he was going out of town again, over Sunday. Then he was going away for a whole week — it was absolutely unavoidable, he said, his commercial duties were increasing — and once he had casually remarked that nothing could stand in the way where she was concerned — never! She did not think of reproaching him with this; she was too proud. If he was going, he must go. She would not be willing to say to herself that she had ever attempted to hold any man. But, just the same, she was agonized by the thought. When he was with her, he seemed tender enough; only, at times, his eyes wandered and he seemed slightly bored. Other girls, particularly pretty ones, seemed to interest him as much as she did.

And the agony of the long days when he did not come any more for a week or two at a time! The waiting, the brooding, the wondering, at the store and here in her home — in the former place making mistakes at times because she could not get her mind off him and being reminded of them, and here at her own home at nights, being so absent-minded that her parents remarked on it. She felt sure that her parents must be noticing that Arthur was not coming any more, or as much as he had — for she pretended to be going out with him, going to Mabel Gove's instead — and that Barton had deserted her too, he having been driven off by her indifference, never to come any more, perhaps, unless she sought him out.

And then it was that the thought of saving her own face by taking up with Barton once more occurred to her, of using him

and his affections and faithfulness and dullness, if you will, to cover up her own dilemma. Only, this ruse was not to be tried until she had written Arthur this one letter — a pretext merely to see if there was a single ray of hope, a letter to be written in a gentle-enough way and asking for the return of the few notes she had written him. She had not seen him now in nearly a month, and the last time she had, he had said he might soon be compelled to leave her awhile — to go to Pittsburgh to work. And it was his reply to this that she now held in her hand — from Pittsburgh! It was frightful! The future without him!

But Barton would never know really what had transpired, if she went back to him. In spite of all her delicious hours with Arthur, she could call him back, she felt sure. She had never really entirely dropped him, and he knew it. He had bored her dreadfully on occasion, arriving on off days when Arthur was not about, with flowers or candy, or both, and sitting on the porch steps and talking of the railroad business and of the whereabouts and doings of some of their old friends. It was shameful, she had thought at times, to see a man so patient, so hopeful, so good-natured as Barton, deceived in this way, and by her, who was so miserable over another. Her parents must see and know, she had thought at these times, but still, what else was she to do?

“I’m a bad girl,” she kept telling herself. “I’m all wrong. What right have I to offer Barton what is left?” But still, somehow, she realized that Barton, if she chose to favor him, would only be too grateful for even the leavings of others where she was concerned, and that even yet, if she but deigned to crook a finger, she could have him. He was so simple, so good-natured, so stolid and matter of fact, so different to Arthur whom (she could not help smiling at the thought of it)

she was loving now about as Barton loved her — slavishly, hopelessly.

And then, as the days passed and Arthur did not write any more — just this one brief note — she at first grieved horribly, and then in a fit of mawkish despair attempted, bravely enough from one point of view, to adjust herself to the new situation. Why should she despair? Why die of agony where there were plenty who would still sigh for her — Barton among others? She was young, pretty, very — many told her so. She could, if she chose, achieve a vivacity which she did not feel. Why should she brook this unkindness without a thought of retaliation? Why shouldn't she enter upon a gay and heartless career, indulging in a dozen flirtations at once — dancing and killing all thoughts of Arthur in a round of frivolities? There were many who beckoned to her. She stood at her counter in the drug store on many a day and brooded over this, but at the thought of which one to begin with, she faltered. After her late love, all were so tame, for the present anyhow.

And then — and then — always there was Barton, the humble or fawning, to whom she had been so unkind and whom she had used and whom she still really liked. So often self-reproaching thoughts in connection with him crept over her. He must have known, must have seen how badly she was using him all this while, and yet he had not failed to come and come, until she had actually quarreled with him, and any one would have seen that it was literally hopeless. She could not help remembering, especially now in her pain, that he adored her. He was not ending on her now at all — by her indifference she had finally driven him away — but a word, a word — she waited for days, weeks, hoping against hope, and then —

The office of Barton's superior in the Great Eastern terminal

had always made him an easy object for her blandishments, coming and going, as she frequently did, via this very station. He was in the office of the assistant train-despatcher on the ground floor, where passing to and from the local, which, at times, was quicker than a street car, she could easily see him by peering in; only, she had carefully avoided him for nearly a year. If she chose now, and would call for a message blank at the adjacent telegraph window which was a part of his room, and raised her voice as she often had in the past, he could scarcely fail to hear, if he did not see her. And if he did he would rise and come over — of that she was sure — for he never could resist her. It had been a wife of hers in the old days to do this or to make her presence felt by idling outside. After a month of brooding, she felt that she must act — her position as a deserted girl was too much. She could not stand it any longer really — the eyes of her mother, for one.

It was six fifteen one evening when, coming out of the store in which she worked, she turned her step disconsolately homeward. Her heart was heavy, her face rather pale and drawn. She had stopped in the store's retiring room before coming out to add to her charms as much as possible by a little powder and rouge and to smooth her hair. It would not take much to reallure her former sweetheart, she felt sure — and yet it might not be so easy after all. Suppose he had found another? But she could not believe that. It had scarcely been long enough since he had last attempted to see her, and he was really so very, very fond of her and so faithful. He was too slow and certain in his choosing — he had been so with her. Still, who knows? With this thought, she went forward in the evening, feeling for the first time the shame and pain that comes of deception, the agony of having to relinquish an ideal and the feeling of despair that comes to those who had there-

selves in the position of suppliants, stooping to something which in better days and better fortune they would not know. Arthur was the cause of this.

When she reached the station, the crowd that usually filled it at this hour was swarming. There were so many pairs like Arthur and herself laughing and hurrying away or so she felt. First glancing in the small mirror of a weighing scale to see if she were still of her former charm, she stopped thoughtfully at a little flower stand which stood outside, and for a few pennies purchased a tiny bunch of violets. She then went inside and stood near the window, peering first furtively to see if he were present. He was. Bent over his work, a green shade over his eyes, she could see his solid genial figure at a table. Stepping back a moment to ponder, she finally went forward and, in a clear voice, asked,

“May I have a blank, please?”

The infatuation of the discarded Barton was such that it brought him instantly to his feet. In his stodgy, stocky way he rose, his eyes glowing with a friendly hope, his mouth wreathed in smiles, and came over. At the sight of her, pale, but pretty — paler and prettier, really, than he had ever seen her — he thrilled dumbly.

“How are you, Shirley?” he asked sweetly, as he drew near, his eyes searching her face hopefully. He had not seen her for so long that he was intensely hungry, and her paler beauty appealed to him more than ever. Why wouldn’t she have him? he was asking himself. Why wouldn’t his persistent love yet win her? Perhaps it might. “I haven’t seen you in a month of Sundays, it seems. How are the folks?”

“They’re all right, Bart,” she smiled archly, “and so am I. How have you been? It has been a long time since I’ve seen you. I’ve been wondering how you were. Have you been all right? I was just going to send a message.”



As he had approached, Shirley had pretended at first not to see him, a moment later to affect surprise, although she was really suppressing a heavy sigh. The sight of him, after Arthur, was not reassuring. Could she really interest herself in him any more? Could she?

"Sure, sure," he replied genially; "I'm always all right. You couldn't kill me, you know. Not going away, are you, Shirl?" he queried interestedly.

"No; I'm just telegraphing to Mabel. She promised to meet me to-morrow, and I want to be sure she will."

"You don't come past here as often as you did, Shirley," he complained tenderly. "At least, I don't seem to see you so often," he added with a smile. "It isn't anything I have done, is it?" he queried, and then, when she protested quickly, added: "What's the trouble, Shirl? Haven't been sick, have you?"

She affected all her old gaiety and ease, feeling as though she would like to cry.

"Oh, no," she returned; "I've been all right. I've been going through the other door, I suppose, or coming in and going out on the Langdon Avenue car." (This was true, because she had been wanting to avoid him.) "I've been in such a hurry, most nights, that I haven't had time to stop, Bart. You know how late the store keeps us at times."

He remembered, too, that in the old days she had made time to stop or meet him occasionally.

"Yes, I know," he said tactfully. "But you haven't been to any of our old card-parties either of late, have you? At least, I haven't seen you. I've gone to two or three, thinking you might be there."

That was another thing Arthur had done — broken up her interest in these old store and neighborhood parties and a banjo-and-mandolin club to which she had once belonged. They

had all seemed so pleasing and amusing in the old days — but now — . . . In those days Bart had been her usual companion when his work permitted.

“No,” she replied evasively, but with a forced air of pleasant remembrance; “I have often thought of how much fun we had at those, though. It was a shame to drop them. You haven’t seen Harry Stull or Trina Trask recently, have you?” she inquired, more to be saying something than for any interest she felt.

He shook his head negatively, then added:

“Yes, I did, too; here in the waiting-room a few nights ago. They were coming down-town to a theater, I suppose.”

His face fell slightly as he recalled how it had been their custom to do this, and what their one quarrel had been about. Shirley noticed it. She felt the least bit sorry for him, but much more for herself, coming back so disconsolately to all this.

“Well, you’re looking as pretty as ever, Shirley,” he continued, noting that she had not written the telegram and that there was something wistful in her glance. “Prettier, I think,” and she smiled sadly. Every word that she tolerated from him was as so much gold to him, so much of dead ashes to her. “You wouldn’t like to come down some evening this week and see ‘The Mouse-Trap,’ would you? We haven’t been to a theater together in I don’t know when.” His eyes sought hers in a hopeful, doglike way.

So — she could have him again — that was the pity of it! To have what she really did not want, did not care for! At the least nod now he would come, and this very devotion made it all but worthless, and so sad. She ought to marry him now for certain, if she began in this way, and could in a month’s time if she chose, but oh, oh — could she? For the moment she decided that she could not, would not. If he had only re-

pulsed her — told her to go — ignored her — but no; it was her fate to be loved by him in this moving, pleading way, and hers not to love him as she wished to love — to be loved. Plainly, he needed some one like her, whereas she, she — She turned a little sick, a sense of the sacrilege of gaiety at this time creeping into her voice, and exclaimed:

“No, no!” Then seeing his face change, a heavy sadness come over it, “Not this week, anyhow, I mean” (“Not so soon,” she had almost said). “I have several engagements this week and I’m not feeling well. But” — seeing his face change, and the thought of her own state returning — “you might come out to the house some evening instead, and then we can go some other time.”

His face brightened intensely. It was wonderful how he longed to be with her, how the least favor from her comforted and lifted him up. She could see also now, however, how little it meant to her, how little it could ever mean, even if to him it was heaven. The old relationship would have to be resumed in toto, once and for all, but did she want it that way now that she was feeling so miserable about this other affair? As she meditated, these various moods racing to and fro in her mind, Barton seemed to notice, and now it occurred to him that perhaps he had not pursued her enough — was too easily put off. She probably did like him yet. This evening, her present visit, seemed to prove it.

“Sure, sure!” he agreed. “I’d like that. I’ll come out Sunday, if you say. We can go any time to the play. I’m sorry, Shirley, if you’re not feeling well. I’ve thought of you a lot these days. I’ll come out Wednesday, if you don’t mind.”

She smiled a wan smile. It was all so much easier than she had expected — her triumph — and so ashenlike in consequence, a flavor of dead-sea fruit and defeat about it all, that

it was pathetic. How could she, after Arthur? How could he, really?

"Make it Sunday," she pleaded, naming the farthest day off, and then hurried out.

Her faithful lover gazed after her, while she suffered an intense nausea. To think — to think — it should all be coming to this! She had not used her telegraph-blank, and now had forgotten all about it. It was not the simple trickery that discouraged her, but her own future which could find no better outlet than this, could not rise above it apparently, or that she had no heart to make it rise above it. Why couldn't she interest herself in some one different to Barton? Why did she have to return to him? Why not wait and meet some other — ignore him as before? But no, no; nothing mattered now — no one — it might as well be Barton as any one, and she would at least make him happy and at the same time solve her own problem. She went out into the train-shed and climbed into her train. Slowly, after the usual pushing and jostling of a crowd, it drew out toward Latonia, that suburban region in which her home lay. As she rode, she thought.

"What have I just done? What am I doing?" she kept asking herself as the clacking wheels on the rails fell into a rhythmic dance and the houses of the brown, dry, endless city fled past in a maze. "Severing myself decisively from the past — the happy past — for supposing, once I am married, Arthur should return and want me again — suppose! Suppose!"

Below at one place, under a shed, were some market-gardeners disposing of the last remnants of their day's wares — a sickly, dull life, she thought. Here was Rutgers Avenue, with its line of red street-cars, many wagons and tracks and counter-streams of automobiles — how often had she passed it morning and evening in a shuttle-like way, and how often

would, unless she got married! And here, now, was the river flowing smoothly between its banks lined with coal-pockets and wharves — away, away to the huge deep sea which she and Arthur had enjoyed so much. Oh, to be in a small boat and drift out, out into the endless, restless, pathless deep! Somehow the sight of this water, to-night and every night, brought back those evenings in the open with Arthur at Sparrows Point, the long line of dancers in Eckert's Pavilion, the woods at Atholby, the park, with the dancers in the pavilion — she choked back a sob. Once Arthur had come this way with her on just such an evening as this, pressing her hand and saying how wonderful she was. Oh, Arthur! Arthur! And now Barton was to take his old place again — forever, no doubt. She could not trifle with her life longer in this foolish way, or his. What was the use? But think of it!

Yes, it must be — forever now, she told herself. She must marry. Time would be slipping by and she would become too old. It was her only future — marriage. It was the only future she had ever contemplated really, a home, children, the love of some man whom she could love as she loved Arthur. Ah, what a happy home that would have been for her! But now, now —

But there must be no turning back now, either. There was no other way. If Arthur ever came back — but fear not, he wouldn't! She had risked so much and lost — lost him. Her little venture into true love had been such a failure. Before Arthur had come all had been well enough. Barton, stout and simple and frank and direct, had in some way — how, she could scarcely realize now — offered sufficient of a future. But now, now! He had enough money, she knew, to build a cottage for the two of them. He had told her so. He would do his best always to make her happy, she was sure of that. They could



live in about the state her parents were living in — or a little better, not much — and would never want. No doubt there would be children, because he craved them — several of them — and that would take up her time, long years of it — the sad, gray years! But then Arthur, whose children she would have thrilled to bear, would be no more, a mere memory — think of that! — and Barton, the dull, the commonplace, would have achieved his finest dream — and why?

Because love was a failure for her — that was why — and in her life there could be no more true love. She would never love any one again as she had Arthur. It could not be, she was sure of it. He was too fascinating, too wonderful. Always, always, wherever she might be, whoever she might marry, he would be coming back, intruding between her and any possible love, receiving any possible kiss. It would be Arthur she would be loving or kissing. She dabbed at her eyes with a tiny handkerchief, turned her face close to the window and stared out, and then as the environs of Latonia came into view, wondered (so deep is romance): What if Arthur should come back at some time — or now! Supposing he should be here at the station now, accidentally or on purpose, to welcome her, to soothe her weary heart. He had met her here before. How she would fly to him, lay her head on his shoulder, forget forever that Barton ever was, that they had ever separated for an hour. Oh, Arthur! Arthur!

But no, no; here was Latonia — here the viaduct over her train, the long business street and the cars marked "Center" and "Langdon Avenue" running back into the great city. A few blocks away in tree-shaded Bethune Street, duller and plainer than ever, was her parents' cottage and the routine of that old life which was now, she felt, more fully fastened upon her than ever before — the lawn-mowers, the lawns, the front

porches all alike. Now would come the going to and fro of Barton to business as her father and she now went to business, her keeping house, cooking, washing, ironing, sewing for Barton as her mother now did these things for her father and herself. And she would not be in love really, as she wanted to be. Oh, dreadful! She could never escape it really, now that she could endure it less, scarcely for another hour. And yet she must, must, for the sake of — for the sake of — she closed her eyes and dreamed.

She walked up the street under the trees, past the houses and lawns all alike to her own, and found her father on their veranda reading the evening paper. She sighed at the sight.

“Back, daughter?” he called pleasantly.

“Yes.”

“Your mother is wondering if you would like steak or liver for dinner. Better tell her.”

“Oh, it doesn’t matter.”

She hurried into her bedroom, threw down her hat and gloves, and herself on the bed to rest silently, and groaned in her soul. To think that it had all come to this! — Never to see him any more! — To see only Barton, and marry him and live in such a street, have four or five children, forget all her youthful companionships — and all to save her face before her parents, and her future. Why must it be? Should it be, really? She choked and stifled. After a little time her mother, hearing her come in, came to the door — thin, practical, affectionate, conventional.

“What’s wrong, honey? Aren’t you feeling well to-night? Have you a headache? Let me feel.”

Her thin cool fingers crept over her temples and hair. She suggested something to eat or a headache powder right away.

“I’m all right, mother. I’m just not feeling well now. Don’t bother. I’ll get up soon. Please don’t.”

"Would you rather have liver or steak to-night, dear?"

"Oh, anything—nothing—please don't bother—steak will do—anything"—if only she could get rid of her and be at rest.

Her mother looked at her and shook her head sympathetically, then retreated quietly, saying no more. Lying so, she thought and thought—grinding, destroying thoughts about the beauty of the past, the darkness of the future—until able to endure them no longer she got up and, looking distractedly out of the window into the yard and the house next door, stared at her future fixedly. What should she do? What should she really do? There was Mrs. Kessel in her kitchen getting her dinner as usual, just as her own mother was now, and Mr. Kessel out on the front porch in his shirt-sleeves reading the evening paper. Beyond was Mr. Pollard in his yard, cutting the grass. All along Bethune Street were such houses and such people—simple, commonplace souls all—clerks, managers, fairly successful craftsmen, like her father and Barton, excellent in their way but not like Arthur the beloved, the lost—and here was she, perforce, or by decision of necessity, soon to be one of them, in some such street as this no doubt, forever and—. For the moment it choked and stifled her.

She decided that she would not. No, no, no! There must be some other way—many ways. She did not have to do this unless she really wished to—would not—only—. Then going to the mirror she looked at her face and smoothed her hair.

"But what's the use?" she asked of herself wearily and resignedly after a time. "Why should I cry? Why shouldn't I marry Barton? I don't amount to anything, anyhow. Arthur wouldn't have me. I wanted him, and I am compelled to take some one else—or no one—what difference does it really make who? My dreams are too high, that's all. I wanted

Arthur, and he wouldn't have me. I don't want Barton, and he crawls at my feet. I'm a failure, that's what's the matter with me."

And then, turning up her sleeves and removing a fichu which stood out too prominently from her breast, she went into the kitchen and, looking about for an apron, observed:

"Can't I help? Where's the tablecloth?" and finding it among napkins and silverware in a drawer in the adjoining room, proceeded to set the table.

## THE GAY OLD DOG<sup>1</sup>

By EDNA FERBER

THOSE of you who have dwelt — or even lingered — in Chicago, Illinois (this is not a humorous story), are familiar with the region known as the Loop. For those others of you to whom Chicago is a transfer point between New York and San Francisco there is presented this brief explanation:

The Loop is a clamorous, smoke-infested district embraced by the iron arms of the elevated tracks. In a city boasting fewer millions, it would be known familiarly as downtown. From Congress to Lake Street, from Wabash almost to the river, those thunderous tracks make a complete circle, or loop. Within it lie the retail shops, the commercial hotels, the theaters, the restaurants. It is the Fifth Avenue (diluted) and the Broadway (deleted) of Chicago. And he who frequents it by night in search of amusement and cheer is known, vulgarly, as a loop-hound.

Jo Hertz was a loop-hound. On the occasion of those sparse first nights granted the metropolis of the Middle West he was always present, third row, aisle, left. When a new loop café was opened, Jo's table always commanded an unobstructed view of anything worth viewing. On entering he was wont to say, "Hello, Gus," with careless cordiality to the head-waiter, the while his eye roved expertly from table to table as he removed his gloves. He ordered things under glass, so that his table, at midnight or thereabouts, resembled a hot-bed that favors the bell system. The waiters fought for him. He was

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the kind of man who mixes his own salad dressing. He liked to call for a bowl, some cracked ice, lemon, garlic, paprika, salt, pepper, vinegar and oil, and make a rite of it. People at near-by tables would lay down their knives and forks to watch, fascinated. The secret of it seemed to lie in using all the oil in sight and calling for more.

That was Jo — a plump and lonely bachelor of fifty. A plethoric, roving-eyed and kindly man, clutching vainly at the garments of a youth that had long slipped past him. Jo Hertz, in one of those pinch-waist belted suits and a trench coat and a little green hat, walking up Michigan Avenue of a bright winter's afternoon, trying to take the curb with a jaunty youthfulness against which every one of his fat-encased muscles rebelled, was a sight for mirth or pity, depending on one's vision.

The gay-dog business was a late phase in the life of Jo Hertz. He had been a quite different sort of canine. The staid and harassed brother of three unwed and selfish sisters is an under dog. The tale of how Jo Hertz came to be a loop-hound should not be compressed within the limits of a short story. It should be told as are the photoplays, with frequent throw-backs and many cut-ins. To condense twenty-three years of a man's life into some five or six thousand words requires a verbal economy amounting to parsimony.

At twenty-seven Jo had been the dutiful, hard-working son (in the wholesale harness business) of a widowed and gummidging mother, who called him Joey. If you had looked close you would have seen that now and then a double wrinkle would appear between Jo's eyes — a wrinkle that had no business there at twenty-seven. Then Jo's mother died, leaving him handicapped by a death-bed promise, the three sisters and a three-story-and-basement house on Calumet Avenue. Jo's wrinkle became a fixture.

Death-bed promises should be broken as lightly as they are seriously made. The dead have no right to lay their clammy fingers upon the living.

"Joey," she had said, in her high, thin voice, "take care of the girls."

"I will, ma," Jo had choked.

"Joey," and the voice was weaker, "promise me you won't marry till the girls are all provided for." Then as Jo had hesitated, appalled: "Joey, it's my dying wish. Promise!"

"I promise, ma," he had said.

Whereupon his mother had died, comfortably, leaving him with a completely ruined life.

They were not bad-looking girls, and they had a certain style, too. That is, Stell and Eva had. Carrie, the middle one, taught school over on the West Side. In those days it took her almost two hours each way. She said the kind of costume she required should have been corrugated steel. But all three knew what was being worn, and they wore it — or fairly faithful copies of it. Eva, the housekeeping sister, had a needle knack. She could skim the State Street windows and come away with a mental photograph of every separate tuck, hem, yoke, and ribbon. Heads of departments showed her the things they kept in drawers, and she went home and reproduced them with the aid of a two-dollar-a-day seamstress. Stell, the youngest, was the beauty. They called her Babe. She wasn't really a beauty, but some one had once told her that she looked like Janice Meredith (it was when that work of fiction was at the height of its popularity). For years afterward, whenever she went to parties, she affected a single, fat curl over her right shoulder, with a rose stuck through it.

Twenty-three years ago one's sisters did not strain at the household leash, nor crave a career. Carrie taught school, and

hated it. Eva kept house expertly and complainingly. Babe's profession was being the family beauty, and it took all her spare time. Eva always let her sleep until ten.

This was Jo's household, and he was the nominal head of it. But it was an empty title. The three women dominated his life. They weren't consciously selfish. If you had called them cruel they would have put you down as mad. When you are the lone brother of three sisters, it means that you must constantly be calling for, escorting, or dropping one of them somewhere. Most men of Jo's age were standing before their mirror of a Saturday night, whistling blithely and abstractedly while they discarded a blue polka-dot for a maroon tie, whipped off the maroon for a shot-silk, and at the last moment decided against the shot-silk in favor of a plain black-and-white, because she had once said she preferred quiet ties. Jo, when he should have been preening his feathers for conquest, was saying:

"Well, my God, I *am* hurrying! Give a man time, can't you? I just got home. You girls have been laying around the house all day. No wonder you're ready."

He took a certain pride in seeing his sisters well dressed, at a time when he should have been reveling in fancy waistcoats and brilliant-hued socks, according to the style of that day, and the inalienable right of any unwed male under thirty, in any day. On those rare occasions when his business necessitated an out-of-town trip, he would spend half a day floundering about the shops selecting handkerchiefs, or stockings, or feathers, or fans, or gloves for the girls. They always turned out to be the wrong kind, judging by their reception.

From Carrie, "What in the world do I want of a fan!"

"I thought you didn't have one," Jo would say.

"I haven't. I never go to dances."

Jo would pass a futile hand over the top of his head, as was

his way when disturbed. "I just thought you'd like one. I thought every girl liked a fan. Just," feebly, "just to — to have."

"Oh, for pity's sake!"

And from Eva or Babe, "I've *got* silk stockings, Jo." Or, "You brought me handkerchiefs the last time."

There was something selfish in his giving, as there always is in any gift freely and joyfully made. They never suspected the exquisite pleasure it gave him to select these things; these fine, soft, silken things. There were many things about this slow-going, amiable brother of theirs that they never suspected. If you had told them he was a dreamer of dreams, for example, they would have been amused. Sometimes, dead-tired by nine o'clock, after a hard day downtown, he would doze over the evening paper. At intervals he would wake, red-eyed, to a snatch of conversation such as, "Yes, but if you get a blue you can wear it anywhere. It's dressy, and at the same time it's quiet, too." Eva, the expert, wrestling with Carrie over the problem of the new spring dress. They never guessed that the commonplace man in the frayed old smoking-jacket had banished them all from the room long ago; had banished himself, for that matter. In his place was a tall, debonair, and rather dangerously handsome man to whom six o'clock spelled evening clothes. The kind of a man who can lean up against a mantel, or propose a toast, or give an order to a man-servant, or whisper a gallant speech in a lady's ear with equal ease. The shabby old house on Calumet Avenue was transformed into a brocaded and chandeliered rendezvous for the brilliance of the city. Beauty was there, and wit. But none so beautiful and witty as She. Mrs. — er — Jo Hertz. There was wine, of course; but no vulgar display. There was music; the soft sheen of satin; laughter. And he the gracious, tactful host, king of his own domain —

"Jo, for heaven's sake, if you're going to snore go to bed!"

"Why — did I fall asleep?"

"You haven't been doing anything else all evening. A person would think you were fifty instead of thirty."

And Jo Hertz was again just the dull, gray, commonplace brother of three well-meaning sisters.

Babe used to say petulantly, "Jo, why don't you ever bring home any of your men friends? A girl might as well not have any brother, all the good you do."

Jo, conscience-stricken, did his best to make amends. But a man who has been petticoat-ridden for years loses the knack, somehow, of comradeship with men. He acquires, too, a knowledge of women, and a distaste for them, equaled only, perhaps, by that of an elevator-starter in a department store.

Which brings us to one Sunday in May. Jo came home from a late Sunday afternoon walk to find company for supper. Carrie often had in one of her school-teacher friends, or Babe one of her frivolous intimates, or even Eva a staid guest of the old-girl type. There was always a Sunday night supper of potato salad, and cold meat, and coffee, and perhaps a fresh cake. Jo rather enjoyed it, being a hospitable soul. But he regarded the guests with the undazzled eyes of a man to whom they were just so many petticoats, timid of the night streets and requiring escort home. If you had suggested to him that some of his sisters' popularity was due to his own presence, or if you had hinted that the more kittenish of these visitors were palpably making eyes at him, he would have stared in amazement and unbelief.

This Sunday night it turned out to be one of Carrie's friends.

"Emily," said Carrie, "this is my brother, Jo."

Jo had learned what to expect in Carrie's friends. Drab-



looking women in the late thirties, whose facial lines all slanted downward.

"Happy to meet you," said Jo, and looked down at a different sort altogether. A most surprisingly different sort, for one of Carrie's friends. This Emily person was very small, and fluffy, and blue-eyed, and sort of — well, crinkly looking. You know. The corners of her mouth when she smiled, and her eyes when she looked up at you, and her hair, which was brown, but had the miraculous effect, somehow, of being golden.

Jo shook hands with her. Her hand was incredibly small, and soft, so that you were afraid of crushing it, until you discovered she had a firm little grip all her own. It surprised and amused you, that grip, as does a baby's unexpected clutch on your patronizing forefinger. As Jo felt it in his own big clasp, the strangest thing happened to him. Something inside Jo Hertz stopped working for a moment, then lurched sickeningly, then thumped like mad. It was his heart. He stood staring down at her, and she up at him, until the others laughed. Then their hands fell apart, lingeringly.

"Are you a school-teacher, Emily?" he said.

"Kindergarten. It's my first year. And don't call me Emily, please."

"Why not? It's your name. I think it's the prettiest name in the world." Which he hadn't meant to say at all. In fact, he was perfectly aghast to find himself saying it. But he meant it.

At supper he passed her things, and stared, until everybody laughed again, and Eva said acidly, "Why don't you feed her?"

It wasn't that Emily had an air of helplessness. She just made you feel you wanted her to be helpless, so that you could help her.

Jo took her home, and from that Sunday night he began to

strain at the leash. He took his sisters out, dutifully, but he would suggest, with a carelessness that deceived no one, "Don't you want one of your girl friends to come along? That little What's-her-name — Emily, or something. So long's I've got three of you, I might as well have a full squad."

For a long time he didn't know what was the matter with him. He only knew he was miserable, and yet happy. Sometimes his heart seemed to ache with an actual physical ache. He realized that he wanted to do things for Emily. He wanted to buy things for Emily — useless, pretty, expensive things that he couldn't afford. He wanted to buy everything that Emily needed, and everything that Emily desired. He wanted to marry Emily. That was it. He discovered that one day, with a shock, in the midst of a transaction in the harness business. He stared at the man with whom he was dealing until that startled person grew uncomfortable.

"What's the matter, Hertz?"

"Matter?"

"You look as if you'd seen a ghost or found a gold mine. I don't know which."

"Gold mine," said Jo. And then, "No. Ghost."

For he remembered that high, thin voice, and his promise. And the harness business was slithering downhill with dreadful rapidity, as the automobile business began its amazing climb. Jo tried to stop it. But he was not that kind of business man. It never occurred to him to jump out of the down-going vehicle and catch the up-going one. He stayed on, vainly applying brakes that refused to work.

"You know, Emily, I couldn't support two households now. Not the way things are. But if you'll wait. If you'll only wait. The girls might — that is, Babe and Carrie —"

She was a sensible little thing, Emily. "Of course I'll wait.

But we mustn't just sit back and let the years go by. We've got to help."

She went about it as if she were already a little match-making matron. She corraled all the men she had ever known and introduced them to Babe, Carrie, and Eva separately, in pairs, and en masse. She arranged parties at which Babe could display the curl. She got up picnics. She stayed home while Jo took the three about. When she was present she tried to look as plain and obscure as possible, so that the sisters should show up to advantage. She schemed, and planned, and contrived, and hoped; and smiled into Jo's despairing eyes.

And three years went by. Three precious years. Carrie still taught school, and hated it. Eva kept house, more and more complainingly as prices advanced and allowance retreated. Stell was still Babe, the family beauty; but even she knew that the time was past for curls. Emily's hair, somehow, lost its glint and began to look just plain brown. Her crinkliness began to iron out.

"Now, look here!" Jo argued, desperately, one night. "We could be happy, anyway. There's plenty of room at the house. Lots of people begin that way. Of course, I couldn't give you all I'd like to at first. But maybe, after a while —"

No dreams of salons, and brocade, and velvet-footed servants, and satin damask now. Just two rooms, all their own, all alone, and Emily to work for. That was his dream. But it seemed less possible than that other absurd one had been.

You know that Emily was as practical a little thing as she looked fluffy. She knew women. Especially did she know Eva, and Carrie, and Babe. She tried to imagine herself taking the household affairs and the housekeeping pocketbook out of Eva's expert hands. Eva had once displayed to her a sheaf of

aigrettes she had bought with what she saved out of the house-keeping money. So then she tried to picture herself allowing the reins of Jo's house to remain in Eva's hands. And everything feminine and normal in her rebelled. Emily knew she'd want to put away her own freshly laundered linen, and smooth it, and pat it. She was that kind of woman. She knew she'd want to do her own delightful haggling with butcher and vegetable peddler. She knew she'd want to muss Jo's hair, and sit on his knee, and even quarrel with him, if necessary, without the awareness of three ever-present pairs of maiden eyes and ears.

"No! No! We'd only be miserable. I know. Even if they didn't object. And they would, Jo. Wouldn't they?"

His silence was miserable assent. Then, "But you do love me, don't you, Emily?"

"I do, Jo. I love you — and love you — and love you. But, Jo, I — can't."

"I know it, dear. I knew it all the time, really. I just thought, maybe, somehow —"

The two sat staring for a moment into space, their hands clasped. Then they both shut their eyes, with a little shudder, as though what they saw was terrible to look upon. Emily's hand, the tiny hand that was so unexpectedly firm, tightened its hold on his, and his crushed the absurd fingers until she winced with pain.

That was the beginning of the end, and they knew it.

Emily wasn't the kind of girl who would be left to pine. There are too many Jo's in the world whose hearts are prone to lurch and then thump at the feel of a soft, fluttering, incredibly small hand in their grip. One year later Emily was married to a young man whose father owned a large, pie-shaped slice of the prosperous state of Michigan.

That being safely accomplished, there was something grimly humorous in the trend taken by affairs in the old house on Calumet. For Eva married. Of all people, Eva! Married well, too, though he was a great deal older than she. She went off in a hat she had copied from a French model at Fields's, and a suit she had contrived with a home dressmaker, aided by pressing on the part of the little tailor in the basement over on Thirty-first Street. It was the last of that, though. The next time they saw her, she had on a hat that even she would have despaired of copying, and a suit that sort of melted into your gaze. She moved to the North Side (trust Eva for that), and Babe assumed the management of the household on Calumet Avenue. It was rather a pinched little household now, for the harness business shrank and shrank.

"I don't see how you can expect me to keep house decently on this!" Babe would say contemptuously. Babe's nose, always a little inclined to sharpness, had whittled down to a point of late. "If you knew what Ben gives Eva."

"It's the best I can do, Sis. Business is something rotten."

"Ben says if you had the least bit of —" Ben was Eva's husband, and quotable, as are all successful men.

"I don't care what Ben says," shouted Jo, goaded into rage. "I'm sick of your everlasting Ben. Go and get a Ben of your own, why don't you, if you're so stuck on the way he does things."

And Babe did. She made a last desperate drive, aided by Eva, and she captured a rather surprised young man in the brokerage way, who had made up his mind not to marry for years and years. Eva wanted to give her her wedding things, but at that Jo broke into sudden rebellion.

"No, sir! No Ben is going to buy my sister's wedding clothes, understand? I guess I'm not broke — yet. I'll



furnish the money for her things, and there'll be enough of them, too."

Babe had as useless a trousseau, and as filled with extravagant pink-and-blue and lacy and frilly things as any daughter of doting parents. Jo seemed to find a grim pleasure in providing them. But it left him pretty well pinched. After Babe's marriage (she insisted that they call her Estelle now) Jo sold the house on Calumet. He and Carrie took one of those little flats that were springing up, seemingly over night, all through Chicago's South Side.

There was nothing domestic about Carrie. She had given up teaching two years before, and had gone into Social Service work on the West Side. She had what is known as a legal mind, hard, clear, orderly, and she made a great success of it. Her dream was to live at the Settlement House and give all her time to the work. Upon the little household she bestowed a certain amount of grim, capable attention. It was the same kind of attention she would have given a piece of machinery whose oiling and running had been entrusted to her care. She hated it, and didn't hesitate to say so.

Jo took to prowling about department store basements, and household goods sections. He was always sending home a bargain in a ham, or a sack of potatoes, or fifty pounds of sugar, or a window clamp, or a new kind of paring knife. He was forever doing odd little jobs that the janitor should have done. It was the domestic in him claiming its own.

Then, one night, Carrie came home with a dull glow in her leathery cheeks, and her eyes alight with resolve. They had what she called a plain talk.

"Listen, Jo. They've offered me the job of first assistant resident worker. And I'm going to take it. Take it! I know fifty other girls who'd give their ears for it. I go in next month."

They were at dinner. Jo looked up from his plate, dully. Then he glanced around the little dining-room, with its ugly tan walls and its heavy dark furniture (the Calumet Street pieces fitted cumbersomely into the five-room flat).

"Away? Away from here, you mean — to live?"

Carrie laid down her fork. "Well, really, Jo! After all that explanation."

"But to go over there to live! Why, that neighborhood's full of dirt, and disease, and crime, and the Lord knows what all. I can't let you do that, Carrie."

Carrie's chin came up. She laughed a short little laugh. "Let me! That's eighteenth-century talk, Jo. My life's my own to live. I'm going."

And she went. Jo stayed on in the apartment until the lease was up. Then he sold what furniture he could, stored or gave away the rest, and took a room on Michigan Avenue in one of the old stone mansions whose decayed splendor was being put to such purpose.

Jo Hertz was his own master. Free to marry. Free to come and go. And he found he didn't even think of marrying. He didn't even want to come or go, particularly. A rather frumpy old bachelor, with thinning hair and a thickening neck. Much has been written about the unwed, middle-aged woman; her fussiness, her primness, her angularity of mind and body. In the male that same fussiness develops, and a certain primness too. But he grows flabby where she grows lean.

Every Thursday evening he took dinner at Eva's, and on Sunday noon at Stell's. He tucked his napkin under his chin and openly enjoyed the home-made soup and the well-cooked meats. After dinner he tried to talk business with Eva's husband, or Stell's. His business talks were the old-fashioned kind, beginning:

"Well, now, looka here. Take, f'rinstance your raw hides and leathers."

But Ben and George didn't want to take f'rinstance your raw hides and leathers. They wanted, when they took anything at all, to take golf, or politics, or stocks. They were the modern type of business man who prefers to leave his work out of his play. Business, with them, was a profession — a finely graded and balanced thing, differing from Jo's clumsy, downhill style as completely as does the method of a great criminal detective differ from that of a village constable. They would listen, respectively, and say, "Uh-uh," at intervals, and at the first chance they would sort of fade out of the room, with a meaning glance at their wives. Eva had two children now. Girls. They treated Uncle Jo with good-natured tolerance. Stell had no children. Uncle Jo degenerated, by almost imperceptible degrees, from the position of honored guest, who is served with white meat, to that of one who is content with a leg and one of those obscure and bony sections which, after much turning with a bewildered and investigating knife and fork, leave one baffled and unsatisfied.

Eva and Stell got together and decided that Jo ought to marry.

"It isn't natural," Eva told him. "I never saw a man who took so little interest in women."

"Me!" protested Jo, almost shyly. "Women!"

"Yes. Of course. You act like a frightened school-boy."

So they had in for dinner certain friends and acquaintances of fitting age. They spoke of them as "splendid girls." Between thirty-six and forty. They talked awfully well, in a firm, clear way, about civics, and classes, and politics, and economics, and boards. They rather terrified Jo. He didn't understand much that they talked about, and he felt humbly

inferior, and yet a little resentful, as if something had passed him by. He escorted them home, dutifully, though they told him not to bother, and they evidently meant it. They seemed capable, not only of going home quite unattended, but of delivering a pointed lecture to any highwayman or brawler who might molest them.

The following Thursday Eva would say, "How did you like her, Jo?"

"Like who?" Jo would spar feebly.

"Miss Matthews."

"Who's she?"

"Now, don't be funny, Jo. You know very well I mean the girl who was here for dinner. The one who talked so well on the emigration question."

"Oh, her! Why, I liked her, all right. Seems to be a smart woman."

"Smart! She's a perfectly splendid girl."

"Sure," Jo would agree cheerfully.

"But didn't you like her?"

"I can't say I did, Eve. And I can't say I didn't. She made me think a lot of a teacher I had in the fifth reader. Name of Himes. As I recall her, she must have been a fine woman. But I never thought of her as a woman at all. She was just Teacher."

"You make me tired," snapped Eva impatiently. "A man of your age. You don't expect to marry a girl, do you? A child!"

"I don't expect to marry anybody," Jo had answered.

And that was the truth, lonely though he often was.

The following year Eva moved to Winnetka. Any one who got the meaning of the Loop knows the significance of a move to a north shore suburb, and a house. Eva's daugh-

ter, Ethel, was growing up, and her mother had an eye on society.

That did away with Jo's Thursday dinner. Then Stell's husband bought a car. They went out into the country every Sunday. Stell said it was getting so that maids objected to Sunday dinners, anyway. Besides, they were unhealthy, old-fashioned things. They always meant to ask Jo to come along, but by the time their friends were placed, and the lunch, and the boxes, and sweaters, and George's camera, and everything, there seemed to be no room for a man of Jo's bulk. So that eliminated the Sunday dinners.

"Just drop in any time during the week," Stell said, "for dinner. Except Wednesday — that's our bridge night — and Saturday. And, of course, Thursday. Cook is out that night. Don't wait for me to 'phone."

And so Jo drifted into that sad-eyed, dyspeptic family made up of those you see dining in second-rate restaurants, their paper propped up against the bowl of oyster crackers, munching solemnly and with indifference to the stare of the passer-by surveying them through the brazen plate-glass window.

And then came the War. The war that spelled death and destruction to millions. The war that brought a fortune to Jo Hertz, and transformed him, over night, from a baggy-kneed old bachelor whose business was a failure to a prosperous manufacturer whose only trouble was the shortage in hides for the making of his product — leather! The armies of Europe called for it. Harnesses! More harnesses! Straps! Millions of straps! More! More!

The musty old harness business over on Lake Street was magically changed from a dust-covered, dead-alive concern to an orderly hive that hummed and glittered with success.



Orders poured in. Jo Hertz had inside information on the War. He knew about troops and horses. He talked with French and English and Italian buyers — noblemen, many of them — commissioned by their countries to get American-made supplies. And now, when he said to Ben or George, "Take f'rinstance your raw hides and leathers," they listened with respectful attention.

And then began the gay-dog business in the life of Jo Hertz. He developed into a loop-hound, ever keen on the scent of fresh pleasure. That side of Jo Hertz which had been repressed and crushed and ignored began to bloom, unhealthily. At first he spent money on his rather contemptuous nieces. He sent them gorgeous fans, and watch bracelets, and velvet bags. He took two expensive rooms at a downtown hotel, and there was something more tear-compelling than grotesque about the way he gloated over the luxury of a separate ice-water tap in the bathroom. He explained it.

"Just turn it on. Ice-water! Any hour of the day or night."

He bought a car. Naturally. A glittering affair; in color a bright blue, with pale-blue leather straps and a great deal of gold fittings and wire wheels. Eva said it was the kind of a thing a soubrette would use, rather than an elderly business man. You saw him driving about in it, red-faced and rather awkward at the wheel. You saw him, too, in the Pompeiian room at the Congress Hotel of a Saturday afternoon when doubtful and roving-eyed matrons in kolinsky capes are wont to congregate to sip pale amber drinks. Actors grew to recognize the semi-bald head and the shining, round, good-natured face looming out at them from the dim well of the parquet, and sometimes, in a musical show, they directed a quip at him, and he liked it. He could pick out the critics as they came down

the aisle, and even had a nodding acquaintance with two of them.

"Kelly, of the *Herald*," he would say carelessly. "Bean, of the *Trib*. They're all afraid of him."

So he frolicked, ponderously. In New York he might have been called a Man About Town.

And he was lonesome. He was very lonesome. So he searched about in his mind and brought from the dim past the memory of the luxuriously furnished establishment of which he used to dream in the evenings when he dozed over his paper in the old house on Calumet. So he rented an apartment, many-roomed and expensive, with a man-servant in charge, and furnished it in styles and periods ranging through all the Louis. The living-room was mostly rose color. It was like an unhealthy and bloated boudoir. And yet there was nothing sybaritic or uncleanly in the sight of this paunchy, middle-aged man sinking into the rosy-cushioned luxury of his ridiculous home. It was a frank and naïve indulgence of long-starved senses, and there was in it a great resemblance to the rolling-eyed ecstasy of a school-boy smacking his lips over an all-day sucker.

The War went on, and on, and on. And the money continued to roll in — a flood of it. Then, one afternoon, Eva, in town on shopping bent, entered a small, exclusive, and expensive shop on Michigan Avenue. Exclusive, that is, in price. Eva's weakness, you may remember, was hats. She was seeking a hat now. She described what she sought with a languid conciseness, and stood looking about her after the saleswoman had vanished in quest of it. The room was becomingly rose-illuminated and somewhat dim, so that some minutes had passed before she realized that a man seated on a raspberry brocade settee not five feet away — a man with

a walking stick, and yellow gloves, and tan spats, and a check suit — was her brother Jo. From him Eva's wild-eyed glance leaped to the woman who was trying on hats before one of the many long mirrors. She was seated, and a saleswoman was exclaiming discreetly at her elbow.

Eva turned sharply and encountered her own saleswoman returning, hat-laden. "Not to-day," she gasped. "I'm feeling ill. Suddenly." And almost ran from the room.

That evening she told Stell, relating her news in that telephone pidgin-English devised by every family of married sisters as protection against the neighbors and Central. Translated, it ran thus:

"He looked straight at me. My dear, I thought I'd die! But at least he had sense enough not to speak. She was one of those limp, willowy creatures with the greediest eyes that she tried to keep softened to a baby stare, and couldn't, she was so crazy to get her hands on those hats. I saw it all in one awful minute. You know the way I do. I suppose some people would call her pretty. I don't. And her color! Well! And the most expensive-looking hats. Aigrettes, and paradise, and feathers. Not one of them under seventy-five. Isn't it disgusting! At his age! Suppose Ethel had been with me!"

The next time it was Stell who saw them. In a restaurant. She said it spoiled her evening. And the third time it was Ethel. She was one of the guests at a theater party given by Nicky Overton II. You know. The North Shore Overtons. Lake Forest. They came in late, and occupied the entire third row at the opening performance of "Believe Me!" And Ethel was Nicky's partner. She was glowing like a rose. When the lights went up after the first act Ethel saw that her uncle Jo was seated just ahead of her with what she afterward de-

scribed as a Blonde. Then her uncle had turned around, and seeing her, had been surprised into a smile that spread genially all over his plump and rubicund face. Then he had turned to face forward again, quickly.

"Who's the old bird?" Nicky had asked. Ethel had pretended not to hear, so he had asked again.

"My uncle," Ethel answered, and flushed all over her delicate face, and down to her throat. Nicky had looked at the Blonde, and his eyebrows had gone up ever so slightly.

It spoiled Ethel's evening. More than that, as she told her mother of it later, weeping, she declared it had spoiled her life.

Eva talked it over with her husband in that intimate, kimonoed hour that precedes bedtime. She gesticulated heatedly with her hair brush.

"It's disgusting, that's what it is. Perfectly disgusting. There's no fool like an old fool. Imagine! A creature like that. At his time of life."

There exists a strange and loyal kinship among men. "Well, I don't know," Ben said now, and even grinned a little. "I suppose a boy's got to sow his wild oats some time."

"Don't be any more vulgar than you can help," Eva retorted. "And I think you know, as well as I, what it means to have that Overton boy interested in Ethel."

"If he's interested in her," Ben blundered, "I guess the fact that Ethel's uncle went to the theater with some one who wasn't Ethel's aunt won't cause a shudder to run up and down his frail young frame, will it?"

"All right," Eva had retorted. "If you're not man enough to stop it, I'll have to, that's all. I'm going up there with Stell this week."

They did not notify Jo of their coming. Eva telephoned

his apartment when she knew he would be out, and asked his man if he expected his master home to dinner that evening. The man had said yes. Eva arranged to meet Stell in town. They would drive to Jo's apartment together, and wait for him there.

When she reached the city Eva found turmoil there. The first of the American troops to be sent to France were leaving. Michigan Boulevard was a billowing, surging mass: Flags, pennants, bands, crowds. All the elements that make for demonstration. And over the whole — quiet. No holiday crowd, this. A solid, determined mass of people waiting patient hours to see the khaki-clads go by. Three years of indefatigable reading had brought them to a clear knowledge of what these boys were going to.

"Isn't it dreadful!" Stell gasped.

"Nicky Overton's only nineteen, thank goodness."

Their car was caught in the jam. When they moved at all it was by inches. When at last they reached Jo's apartment they were flushed, nervous, apprehensive. But he had not yet come in. So they waited.

No, they were not staying to dinner with their brother, they told the relieved houseman. Jo's home has already been described to you. Stell and Eva, sunk in rose-colored cushions, viewed it with disgust, and some mirth. They rather avoided each other's eyes.

"Carrie ought to be here," Eva said. They both smiled at the thought of the austere Carrie in the midst of those rosy cushions, and hangings, and lamps. Stell rose and began to walk about, restlessly. She picked up a vase and laid it down; straightened a picture. Eva got up, too, and wandered into the hall. She stood there a moment, listening. Then she



turned and passed into Jo's bedroom. And there you knew Jo for what he was.

This room was as bare as the other had been ornate. It was Jo, the clean-minded and simple-hearted, in revolt against the cloying luxury with which he had surrounded himself. The bedroom, of all rooms in any house, reflects the personality of its occupant. True, the actual furniture was paneled, cupid-surmounted, and ridiculous. It had been the fruit of Jo's first orgy of the senses. But now it stood out in that stark little room with an air as incongruous and ashamed as that of a pink tarlatan danseuse who finds herself in a monk's cell. None of those wall-pictures with which bachelor bedrooms are reputed to be hung. No satin slippers. No scented notes. Two plain-backed military brushes on the chiffonier (and he so nearly hairless!). A little orderly stack of books on the table near the bed. Eva fingered their titles and gave a little gasp. One of them was on gardening. "Well, of all things!" exclaimed Stell. A book on the War, by an Englishman. A detective story of the lurid type that lulls us to sleep. His shoes ranged in a careful row in the closet, with shoe-trees in every one of them. There was something speaking about them. They looked so human. Eva shut the door on them, quickly. Some bottles on the dresser. A jar of pomade. An ointment such as a man uses who is growing bald and is panic-stricken too late. An insurance calendar on the wall. Some rhubarb-and-soda mixture on the shelf in the bathroom, and a little box of pepsin tablets.

"Eats all kinds of things at all hours of the night," Eva said, and wandered out into the rose-colored front room again with the air of one who is chagrined at her failure to find what she has sought. Stell followed her, furtively.

"Where do you suppose he can be?" she demanded. "It's" — she glanced at her wrist, — "why, it's after six!"

And then there was a little click. The two women sat up, tense. The door opened. Jo came in. He blinked a little. The two women in the rosy room stood up.

"Why — Eve! Why, Babe! Well! Why didn't you let me know?"

"We were just about to leave. We thought you weren't coming home."

Jo came in, slowly. "I was in the jam on Michigan, watching the boys go by." He sat down, heavily. The light from the window fell on him. And you saw that his eyes were red.

And you'll have to learn why. He had found himself one of the thousands in the jam on Michigan Avenue, as he said. He had a place near the curb, where his big frame shut off the view of the unfortunates behind him. He waited with the placid interest of one who has subscribed to all the funds and societies to which a prosperous, middle-aged business man is called upon to subscribe in war time. Then, just as he was about to leave, impatient at the delay, the crowd had cried, with a queer dramatic, exultant note in its voice, "Here they come! Here come the boys!"

Just at that moment two little, futile, frenzied fists began to beat a mad tattoo on Jo Hertz's broad back. Jo tried to turn in the crowd, all indignant resentment. "Say, looka here!"

The little fists kept up their frantic beating and pushing. And a voice — a choked, high little voice — cried, "Let me by! I can't see! You man, you! You big fat man! My boy's going by — to war — and I can't see! Let me by!"

Jo scrooged around, still keeping his place. He looked down. And upturned to him in agonized appeal was the face of little Emily. They stared at each other for what seemed a long, long time. It was really only the fraction of a second.

Then Jo put one great arm firmly around Emily's waist and swung her around in front of him. His great bulk protected her. Emily was clinging to his hand. She was breathing rapidly, as if she had been running. Her eyes were straining up the street.

"Why, Emily, how in the world! —"

"I ran away. Fred didn't want me to come. He said it would excite me too much."

"Fred?"

"My husband. He made me promise to say good-by to Jo at home."

"Jo?"

"Jo's my boy. And he's going to war. So I ran away. I had to see him. I had to see him go."

She was dry-eyed. Her gaze was straining up the street.

"Why, sure," said Jo. "Of course you want to see him." And then the crowd gave a great roar. There came over Jo a feeling of weakness. He was trembling. The boys went marching by.

"There he is," Emily shrilled, above the din. "There he is! There he is! There he —" And waved a futile little hand. It wasn't so much a wave as a clutching. A clutching after something beyond her reach.

"Which one? Which one, Emily?"

"The handsome one. The handsome one. There!" Her voice quavered and died.

Jo put a steady hand on her shoulder. "Point him out," he commanded. "Show me." And the next instant, "Never mind. I see him."

Somehow, miraculously, he had picked him from among the hundreds. Had picked him as surely as his own father might have. It was Emily's boy. He was marching by,

rather stiffly. He was nineteen, and fun-loving, and he had a girl, and he didn't particularly want to go to France and — to go to France. But more than he had hated going, he had hated not to go. So he marched by, looking straight ahead, his jaw set so that his chin stuck out just a little. Emily's boy.

Jo looked at him, and his face flushed purple. His eyes, the hard-boiled eyes of a loop-hound, took on the look of a sad old man. And suddenly he was no longer Jo, the sport; old J. Hertz, the gay dog. He was Jo Hertz, thirty, in love with life, in love with Emily, and with the stinging blood of young manhood coursing through his veins.

Another minute and the boy had passed on up the broad street — the fine, flag-bedecked street — just one of a hundred service-hats bobbing in rhythmic motion like sandy waves lapping a shore and flowing on.

Then he disappeared altogether.

Emily was clinging to Jo. She was mumbling something over and over. "I can't. I can't. Don't ask me to. I can't let him go. Like that. I can't."

Jo said a queer thing.

"Why, Emily! We wouldn't have him stay home, would we? We wouldn't want him to do anything different, would we? Not our boy. I'm glad he volunteered. I'm proud of him. So are you, glad."

Little by little he quieted her. He took her to the car that was waiting, a worried chauffeur in charge. They said good-by, awkwardly. Emily's face was a red, swollen mass.

So it was that when Jo entered his own hallway half an hour later he blinked, dazedly, and when the light from the window fell on him you saw that his eyes were red.

Eva was not one to beat about the bush. She sat forward in her chair, clutching her bag rather nervously.

"Now, look here, Jo. Stell and I are here for a reason. We're here to tell you that this thing's got to stop."

"Thing? Stop?"

"You know very well what I mean. You saw me at the milliner's that day. And night before last, Ethel. We're all disgusted. If you must go about with people like that, please have some sense of decency."

Something gathering in Jo's face should have warned her. But he was slumped down in his chair in such a huddle, and he looked so old and fat that she did not heed it. She went on. "You've got us to consider. Your sisters. And your nieces. Not to speak of your own —"

But he got to his feet then, shaking, and at what she saw in his face even Eva faltered and stopped. It wasn't at all the face of a fat, middle-aged sport. It was a face Jovian, terrible.

"You!" he began, low-voiced, ominous. "You!" He raised a great fist high. "You two murderers! You didn't consider me, twenty years ago. You come to me with talk like that. Where's my boy! You killed him, you two, twenty years ago. And now he belongs to somebody else. Where's my son that should have gone marching by to-day?" He flung his arms out in a great gesture of longing. The red veins stood out on his forehead. "Where's my son! Answer me that, you two selfish, miserable women. Where's my son!" Then, as they huddled together, frightened, wild-eyed: "Out of my house! Out of my house! Before I hurt you!"

They fled, terrified. The door banged behind them.

Jo stood, shaking, in the center of the room. Then he reached for a chair, gropingly, and sat down. He passed one moist, flabby hand over his forehead and it came away wet. The telephone rang. He sat still. It sounded far away and unimportant, like something forgotten. I think he did not



even hear it with his conscious ear. But it rang and rang insistently. Jo liked to answer his telephone when at home.

"Hello!" He knew instantly the voice at the other end.

"That you, Jo?" it said.

"Yes."

"How's my boy?"

"I'm — all right."

"Listen, Jo. The crowd's coming over to-night. I've fixed up a little poker game for you. Just eight of us."

"I can't come to-night, Gert."

"Can't! Why not?"

"I'm not feeling so good."

"You just said you were all right."

"I *am* all right. Just kind of tired."

The voice took on a cooing note. "Is my Joey tired? Then he shall be all comfy on the sofa, and he doesn't need to play if he don't want to. No, sir."

Jo stood staring at the black mouth-piece of the telephone. He was seeing a procession go marching by. Boys, hundreds of boys, in khaki.

"Hello! Hello!" the voice took on an anxious note. "Are you there?"

"Yes," wearily.

"Jo, there's something the matter. You're sick. I'm coming right over."

"No!"

"Why not? You sound as if you'd been sleeping. Look here —"

"Leave me alone!" cried Jo, suddenly, and the receiver clacked onto the hook. "Leave me alone. Leave me alone." Long after the connection had been broken.

He stood staring at the instrument with unseeing eyes.

Then he turned and walked into the front room. All the light had gone out of it. Dusk had come on. All the light had gone out of everything. The zest had gone out of life. The game was over — the game he had been playing against loneliness and disappointment. And he was just a tired old man. A lonely, tired old man in a ridiculous, rose-colored room that had grown, all of a sudden, drab.

## DEFEAT<sup>1</sup>

By JOHN GALSWORTHY

SHE had been standing there on the pavement a quarter of an hour or so after her shilling's worth of concert. Women of her profession are not supposed to have redeeming points, especially when — like May Belinski, as she now preferred to dub herself — they are German, but this woman certainly had music in her soul. She often gave herself these "music baths" when the Promenade Concerts were on, and had just spent half her total wealth in listening to some Mozart and a Beethoven symphony.

She was feeling almost elated, full of divine sound, and of the wonderful summer moonlight which was filling the whole dark town. Women "of a certain type" have, at all events, emotions — and what a comfort that is, even to themselves! To stand just there had become rather a habit of hers. One could seem to be waiting for somebody coming out of the concert, not yet over — which, of course, was precisely what she *was* doing. One need not forever be stealthily glancing and perpetually moving on in that peculiar way, which, while it satisfied the police and Mrs. Grundy, must not quite deceive others as to her business in life. She had only "been at it" long enough to have acquired a nervous dread of almost everything — not long enough to have passed through that dread to callousness. Some women take so much longer than others. And even for a woman "of a certain type" her position was exceptionally nerve-racking in war-time, going as she did by a false name.

<sup>1</sup> From *Tatterdemalion*, by John Galsworthy. Copyright, 1917, 1918, 1920, by Charles Scribner's Sons. By permission of the publishers.

Indeed, in all England there could hardly be a greater pariah than was this German woman of the night.

She idled outside a book-shop humming a little, pretending to read the titles of the books by moonlight, taking off and putting on one of her stained yellow gloves. Now and again she would move up as far as the posters outside the Hall, scrutinising them as if interested in the future, then stroll back again. In her worn and discreet dark dress, and her small hat, she had nothing about her to rouse suspicion, unless it were the trail of violet powder she left on the moonlight.

For the moonlight this evening was almost solid, seeming with its cool still vibration to replace the very air; in it the war-time precautions against light seemed fantastic, like shading candles in a room still full of daylight. What lights there were had the effect of strokes and stipples of dim colour laid by a painter's brush on a background of ghostly whitish blue. The dreamlike quality of the town was perhaps enhanced for her eyes by the veil she was wearing — in daytime no longer white. As the music died out of her, elation also ebbed. Somebody had passed her, speaking German, and she was overwhelmed by a rush of nostalgia. On this moonlight night by the banks of the Rhine — whence she came — the orchards would be heavy with apples; there would be murmurs and sweet scents; the old castle would stand out clear, high over the woods and the chalky-white river. There would be singing far away, and the churning of a distant steamer's screw; and perhaps on the water a log raft still drifting down in the blue light. There would be German voices talking. And suddenly tears oozed up in her eyes, and crept down through the powder on her cheeks. She raised her veil and dabbed at her face with a little, not-too-clean handkerchief, screwed up in her yellow-gloved hand. But the more she dabbed, the more those treacherous

tears ran. Then she became aware that a tall young man in khaki was also standing before the shop-window, not looking at the titles of the books, but eyeing her askance. His face was fresh and open, with a sort of kindly eagerness in his blue eyes. Mechanically she drooped her wet lashes, raised them obliquely, drooped them again, and uttered a little sob . . .

This young man, Captain in a certain regiment, and discharged from hospital at six o'clock that evening, had entered Queen's Hall at half-past seven. Still rather brittle and sore from his wound, he had treated himself to a seat in the Grand Circle, and there had sat, very still and dreamy, the whole concert through. It had been like eating after a long fast — something of the sensation Polar explorers must experience when they return to their first full meal. For he was of the New Army, and before the war had actually believed in music, art, and all that sort of thing. With a month's leave before him, he could afford to feel that life was extraordinarily joyful, his own experiences particularly wonderful; and, coming out into the moonlight, he had taken what can only be described as a great gulp of it, for he was a young man with a sense of beauty. When one has been long in the trenches, lain out wounded in a shell-hole twenty-four hours, and spent three months in hospital, beauty has such an edge of novelty, such a sharp sweetness that it almost gives pain. And London at night is very beautiful. He strolled slowly towards the Circus, still drawing the moonlight deep into his lungs, his cap tilted up a little on his forehead in that moment of unmilitary abandonment; and whether he stopped before the book-shop window because the girl's figure was in some sort a part of beauty, or because he saw that she was crying, he could not have made clear to any one.

Then something — perhaps the scent of powder, perhaps the



yellow glove, or the oblique flutter of the eyelids — told him that he was making what he would have called “a blooming error,” unless he wished for company, which had not been in his thoughts. But her sob affected him, and he said:

“What’s the matter?”

Again her eyelids fluttered sideways, and she stammered: “Not’ing. The beautiful evening — that’s why!”

That a woman of what he now so clearly saw to be “a certain type” should perceive what he himself had just been perceiving, struck him forcibly, and he said:

“Cheer up.”

She looked up again swiftly: “Cheer up! You are not lonesome like me.”

For one of that sort, she looked somehow honest; her tear-streaked face was rather pretty, and he murmured:

“Well, let’s walk a bit, and talk it over.”

They turned the corner, and walked east, along streets empty, and beautiful, with their dulled orange-glowing lamps, and here and there the glint of some blue or violet light. He found it queer and rather exciting — for an adventure of just this kind he had never had. And he said doubtfully:

“How did you get into this? Isn’t it an awfully hopeless sort of life?”

“Ye-es, it ees —” her voice had a queer soft emphasis. “You are limping — haf you been wounded?”

“Just out of hospital to-day.”

“The horrible war — all the misery is because of the war. When will it end?”

He looked at her attentively, and said:

“I say — what nationality are you?”

“Rooshian.”

“Really! I never met a Russian girl.”

He was conscious that she looked at him, then very quickly down. And he said suddenly:

"Is it as bad as they make out?"

She slipped her yellow-gloved hand through his arm.

"Not when I haf any one as nice as you; I never haf yet, though"; she smiled — and her smile was like her speech, slow, confiding — "you stopped because I was sad, others stop because I am gay. I am not fond of men at all. When you know, you are not fond of them."

"Well! You hardly know them at their best, do you? You should see them at the front. By George! they're simply splendid — officers and men, every blessed soul. There's never been anything like it — just one long bit of jolly fine self-sacrifice; it's perfectly amazing."

Turning her blue-grey eyes on him, she answered:

"I expect you are not the last at that. You see in them what you haf in yourself, I think."

"Oh! not a bit — you're quite out. I assure you when we made the attack where I got wounded, there wasn't a single man in my regiment who wasn't an absolute hero. The way they went in — never thinking of themselves — it was simply superb!"

Her teeth came down on her lower lip, and she answered in a queer voice: "It is the same too perhaps with — the enemy."

"Oh yes, I know that."

"Ah! You are not a mean man. How I hate mean men!"

"Oh! they're not mean really — they simply don't understand."

"Oh! you are a baby — a good baby, aren't you?"

He did not like being called a baby, and frowned; but was at once touched by the disconcertion in her powdered face. How quickly she was scared!

She said clingingly:

"But I li-ke you for it. It is so good to find a ni-ce man."

This was worse, and he said abruptly:

"About being lonely? Haven't you any Russian friends?"

"Rooshian! No!" Then quickly added: "The town is so beeg! Haf you been in the concert?"

"Yes."

"I, too — I love music."

"I suppose all Russians do."

She looked up at his face again, and seemed to struggle to keep silent; then she said quietly:

"I go there always when I haf the money."

"What! Are you so on the rocks?"

"Well, I haf just one shilling now." And she laughed.

The sound of that little laugh upset him — she had a way of making him feel sorry for her every time she spoke.

They had come by now to a narrow square, east of Gower Street.

"This is where I lif," she said. "Come in!"

He had one long moment of violent hesitation, then yielded to the soft tugging of her hand, and followed. The passage-hall was dimly lighted, and they went upstairs into a front room, where the curtains were drawn, and the gas turned very low. Opposite the window were other curtains dividing off the rest of the apartment. As soon as the door was shut she put up her face and kissed him — evidently formula. What a room! Its green and beetroot colouring and the prevalence of cheap plush disagreeably affected him. Everything in it had that callous look of rooms which seem to be saying to their occupants: "You're here to-day and you'll be gone to-morrow." Everything except one little plant, in a common pot, of maiden-hair fern, fresh and green, looking as if it had been watered

within the hour; in this room it had just the same unexpected touchingness that peeped out of the girl's matter-of-fact cynicism.

Taking off her hat, she went towards the gas, but he said quickly:

"No, don't turn it up; let's have the window open, and the moonlight in." He had a sudden dread of seeing anything plainly — it was stuffy, too, and pulling the curtains apart, he threw up the window. The girl had come obediently from the hearth, and sat down opposite him, leaning her arm on the window-sill and her chin on her hand. The moonlight caught her cheek where she had just renewed the powder, caught her fair crinkly hair; it caught the plush of the furniture, and his own khaki, giving them all a touch of unreality.

"What's your name?" he said.

"May. Well, I call myself that. It's no good askin' yours."

"You're a distrustful little party, aren't you?"

"I haf reason to be, don't you think?"

"Yes, I suppose you're bound to think us all brutes?"

"Well, I haf a lot of reasons to be afraid all my time. I am dreadfully nervous now; I am not trusting anybody. I suppose you haf been killing lots of Germans?"

He laughed.

"We never know, unless it happens to be hand to hand; I haven't come in for that yet."

"But you would be very glad if you had killed some?"

"Glad? I don't think so. We're all in the same boat, so far as that's concerned. We're not glad to kill each other. We do our job — that's all."

"Oh! it is frightful. I expect I haf my broders killed."

"Don't you get any news ever?"

"News! No indeed, no news of anybody in my country. I might not haf a country; all that I ever knew is gone — fader, moder, sisters, broders, all — never any more I shall see them, I suppose, now. The war it breaks and breaks, it breaks hearts." Her little teeth fastened again on her lower lip in that sort of pretty snarl. "Do you know what I was thinkin' when you came up? I was thinkin' of my native town, and the river there in the moonlight. If I could see it again, I would be glad. Were you ever homeseeck?"

"Yes, I have been — in the trenches; but one's ashamed, with all the others."

"Ah! ye-es!" It came from her with a hiss. "Ye-es! You are all comrades there. What is it like for me here, do you think, where everybody hates and despises me, and would catch me, and put me in prison, perhaps?"

He could see her breast heaving with a quick breathing painful to listen to. He leaned forward, patting her knee, and murmuring: "Sorry — sorry."

She said in a smothered voice:

"You are the first who has been kind to me for so long! I will tell you the truth — I am not Rooshian at all — I am German."

Hearing that half-choked confession, his thought was: "Does she really think we fight against women?" And he said:

"My dear girl, who cares?"

Her eyes seemed to search right into him. She said slowly:

"Another man said that to me. But he was thinking of other things. You are a verree ni-ice boy. I am so glad I met you. You see the good in people, don't you? That is the first thing in the world — because there is really not much good in people, you know."



He said, smiling:

"You're a dreadful little cynic!" Then thought: "Of course she is — poor thing!"

"Cyneec? How long do you think I would live if I was not a cyneec? I should drown myself to-morrow. Perhaps there are good people, but, you see, I don't know them."

"I know lots."

She leaned forward eagerly.

"Well now — see, ni-ice boy — you haf never been in a hole, haf you?"

"I suppose not a real hole."

"No, I should think not, with your face. Well, suppose I am still a good girl, as I was once, you know, and you took me to some of your good people, and said: 'Here is a little German girl that has no work, and no money, and no friends.' Your good people they will say: 'Oh! how sad! A German girl!' and they will go and wash their hands."

Silence fell on him. He saw his mother, his sisters, others — good people, he would swear! And yet —! He heard their voices, frank and clear; and they seemed to be talking of the Germans. If only she were not German!

"You see!" he heard her say, and could only mutter:

"I'm sure there *are* people."

"No. They would not take a German, even if she was good. Besides, I don't want to be good any more — I am not a hum-bug — I have learned to be bad. Aren't you going to kees me, ni-ice boy?"

She put her face close to his. Her eyes troubled him, but he drew back. He thought she would be offended or persistent, but she was neither; just looked at him fixedly with a curious inquiring stare; and he leaned against the window, deeply disturbed. It was as if all clear and simple enthusiasm had been

suddenly knocked endways; as if a certain splendour of life that he had felt and seen of late had been dipped in cloud. Out there at the front, over here in hospital, life had been seeming so — as it were — heroic; and yet it held such mean and murky depths as well! The voices of his men, whom he had come to love like brothers, crude burring voices, cheery in trouble, making nothing of it; the voices of doctors and nurses, patient, quiet, reassuring voices; even his own voice, infected by it all, kept sounding in his ears. All wonderful somehow, and simple; and nothing mean about it anywhere! And now so suddenly to have lighted upon this, and all that was behind it — this scared girl, this base, dark, thoughtless use of her! And the thought came to him: “I suppose my fellows wouldn’t think twice about taking her on! Why! I’m not even certain of myself, if she insists!” And he turned his face and stared out at the moonlight. He heard her voice:

“Eesn’t it light? No air raid to-night. When the Zepps burned — what a horrible death! And all the people cheered — it is natural. Do you hate us verree much?”

He turned round and said sharply:

“Hate? I don’t know.”

“I don’t hate even the English — I despise them. I despise my people too — perhaps more, because they began this war. Oh, yes! I know that. I despise all the peoples. Why haf they made the world so miserable — why haf they killed all our lives — hundreds and thousands and millions of lives — all for not’ing? They haf made a bad world — everybody hating, and looking for the worst everywhere. They haf made me bad, I know. I believe no more in anything. What is there to believe in? Is there a God? No! Once I was teaching little English children their prayers — isn’t that funnee? I was reading to them about Christ and love. I believed all those

things. Now I believe not'ing at all — no one who is not a fool or a liar can believe. I would like to work in a hospital; I would like to go and help poor boys like you. Because I am a German they would throw me out a hundred times, even if I was good. It is the same in Germany and France and Russia, everywhere. But do you think I will believe in love and Christ and a God and all that? — not I! I think we are animals — that's all! Oh! yes — you fancy it is because my life has spoiled me. It is not that at all — that's not the worst thing in life. Those men are not ni-ice, like you, but it's their nature, and," she laughed, "they help me to live, which is something for me anyway. No, it is the men who think themselves great and good, and make the war with their talk and their hate, killing us all — killing all the boys like you, and keeping poor people in prison, and telling us to go on hating; and all those dreadful cold-blooded creatures who write in the papers — the same in my country, just the same; it is because of all them that I think we are only animals."

He got up, acutely miserable. He could see her following him with her eyes, and knew she was afraid she had driven him away. She said coaxingly: "Don't mind me talking, ni-ice boy. I don't know any one to talk to. If you don't like it, I can be quiet as a mouse."

He muttered:

"Oh! go on, talk away. I'm not obliged to believe you, and I don't."

She was on her feet now, leaning against the wall; her dark dress and white face just touched by the slanting moonlight; and her voice came again, slow and soft and bitter:

"Well, look here, ni-ce boy, what sort of a world is it, where millions are being tortured — horribly tortured, for no fault of theirs, at all? A beautiful world, isn't it! 'Umbug! Silly

rot, as you boys call it. You say it is all 'Comrade'! and braveness out there at the front, and people don't think of themselves. Well, I don't think of myself verree much. What does it matter — I am lost now, anyway; but I think of my people at home, how they suffer and grieve. I think of all the poor people there and here who lose those they love, and all the poor prisoners. Am I not to think of them? And if I do, how am I to believe it a beautiful world, ni-ice boy?"

He stood very still, biting his lips.

"Look here! We haf one life each, and soon it is over. Well, I think that is lucky."

He said resentfully:

"No! there's more than that."

"Ah!" she went on softly; "you think the war is fought for the future; you are giving your lives for a better world, aren't you?"

"We must fight till we win," he said between his teeth.

"Till you win. My people think that, too. All the peoples think that if they win the world will be better. But it will not, you know, it will be much worse, anyway."

He turned away from her and caught up his cap; but her voice followed him.

"I don't care which win, I despise them all — animals — animals — animals! Ah! Don't go, ni-ice boy — I will be quiet now."

He took some notes from his tunic pocket, put them on the table, and went up to her.

"Good-night."

She said plaintively:

"Are you really going? Don't you like me, enough?"

"Yes, I like you."

"It is because I am German, then?"

"No."

"Then why won't you stay?"

He wanted to answer: "Because you upset me so"; but he just shrugged his shoulders.

"Won't you kees me once?"

He bent, and put his lips to her forehead; but as he took them away she threw her head back, pressed her mouth to his, and clung to him.

He sat down suddenly and said:

"Don't! I don't want to feel a brute."

She laughed. "You are a funny boy, but you are verree good. Talk to me a little, then. No one talks to me. I would much rather talk, anyway. Tell me, haf you seen many German prisoners?"

He sighed — from relief, or was it from regret?

"A good many."

"Any from the Rhine?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Were they very sad?"

"Some were — some were quite glad to be taken."

"Did you ever see the Rhine? Isn't it beautiful? It will be wonderful to-night. The moonlight will be the same here as there; in Rooshia too, and France, everywhere; and the trees will look the same as here, and people will meet under them and make love just as here. Oh! isn't it stupid, the war? — as if it was not good to be alive."

He wanted to say: "You can't tell how good it is to be alive, till you're facing death, because you don't live till then. And when a whole lot of you feel like that — and are ready to give their lives for each other, it's worth all the rest of life put together." But he couldn't get it out to this girl who believed in nothing.



"How were you wounded, ni-ice boy?"

"Attacking across open ground — four machine-gun bullets got me at one go off."

"Weren't you verree frightened when they ordered you to attack?" No, he had not been frightened just then! And he shook his head and laughed.

"It was great. We did laugh that morning. They got me much too soon, though — a swindle!"

She stared at him.

"You laughed?"

"Yes, and what do you think was the first thing I was conscious of next morning — my old Colonel bending over me and giving me a squeeze of lemon. If you knew my Colonel you'd still believe in things. There *is* something, you know, behind all this evil. After all, you can only die once, and if it's for your country all the better."

Her face, with intent eyes just touched with bistre, had in the moonlight a most strange, other-world look. Her lips moved:

"No, I believe in nothing. My heart is dead."

"You think so, but it isn't, you know, or you wouldn't have been crying, when I met you."

"If it were not dead, do you think I could live my life — walking the streets every night, pretending to like strange men — never hearing a kind word — never talking, for fear I will be known for a German. Soon I shall take to drinking, then I shall be 'Kaput' very quick. You see, I am practical, I see things clear. To-night I am a little emotional; the moon is funny, you know. But I live for myself only, now. I don't care for anything or anybody."

"All the same, just now you were pitying your people, and prisoners, and that."

"Yes, because they suffer. Those who suffer are like me —

I pity myself, that's all; I am different from your English-women. I see what I am doing; I do not let my mind become a turnip just because I am no longer moral."

"Nor your heart either."

"Ni-ice boy, you are verree obstinate. But all that about love is 'umbug. We love ourselves, nothing more."

Again, at that intense soft bitterness in her voice, he felt stifled, and got up, leaning in the window. The air out there was free from the smell of dust and stale perfume. He felt her fingers slip between his own, and stay unmoving. Since she was so hard, and cynical, why should he pity her? Yet he did. The touch of that hand within his own roused his protective instinct. She had poured out her heart to him — a perfect stranger! He pressed it a little, and felt her fingers crisp in answer. Poor girl! This was perhaps a friendlier moment than she had known for years! And after all, fellow-feeling was bigger than principalities and powers! Fellow-feeling was all-pervading as this moonlight, which she had said would be the same in Germany — as this white ghostly glamour that wrapped the trees, making the orange lamps so quaint and decoratively useless out in the narrow square, where emptiness and silence reigned. He looked around into her face — in spite of bistre and powder, and the faint rouging on her lips, it had a queer, unholy, touching beauty. And he had suddenly the strangest feeling, as if they stood there — the two of them — proving that kindness and human fellowship were stronger than lust, stronger than hate; proving it against meanness and brutality, and the sudden shouting of newspaper boys in some neighbouring street. Their cries, passionately vehement, clashed into each other, and obscured the words — what was it they were calling? His head went up to listen; he felt her hand rigid within his arm — she too was listening. The cries

came nearer, hoarser, more shrill and clamorous; the empty moonlight seemed of a sudden crowded with footsteps, voices, and a fierce distant cheering. "Great victory — great victory! Official! British! Defeat of the 'Uns! Many thousand prisoners!" So it sped by, intoxicating, filling him with a fearful joy; and leaning far out, he waved his cap and cheered like a madman; and the whole night seemed to him to flutter and vibrate, and answer. Then he turned to rush down into the street, struck against something soft, and recoiled. The girl! She stood with hands clenched, her face convulsed, panting, and even in the madness of his joy he felt for her. To hear this — in the midst of enemies! All confused with the desire to do something, he stooped to take her hand; and the dusty reek of the tablecloth clung to his nostrils. She snatched away her fingers, swept up the notes he had put down, and held them out to him.

"Take them — I will not haf your English money — take them." And suddenly she tore them across twice, three times, let the bits flutter to the floor, and turned her back to him. He stood looking at her leaning against the plush-covered table which smelled of dust; her head down, a dark figure in a dark room with the moonlight sharpening her outline — hardly a moment he stayed, then made for the door . . .

When he was gone she still stood there, her chin on her breast — she who cared for nothing, believed in nothing — with the sound in her ears of cheering, of hurrying feet, and voices; stood, in the centre of a pattern made by fragments of the torn-up notes, staring out into the moonlight, seeing, not this hated room and the hated square outside, but a German orchard, and herself, a little girl, plucking apples, a big dog beside her; a hundred other pictures, too, such as the drowning see. Her heart swelled; she sank down on the floor,

laid her forehead on the dusty carpet, and pressed her body to it.

She who did not care — who despised all peoples, even her own — began, mechanically, to sweep together the scattered fragments of the notes, assembling them with the dust into a little pile, as of fallen leaves, and dabbling in it with her fingers, while the tears ran down her cheeks. For her country she had torn them, her country in defeat! She, who had just one shilling in this great town of enemies, who wrung her stealthy living out of the embraces of her foes! And suddenly in the moonlight she sat up and began to sing with all her might — “*Die Wacht am Rhein.*”

## THE BIRD IN THE BUSH<sup>1</sup>

By KATHERINE FULLERTON GEROULD

WHEN Rhoda Glave came down into the library, she found that her husband had gone out. It seemed odd, until she remembered that Haysthorpe, their guest, had an inordinate appetite for midnight air. Evidently he had persuaded Roland to join him, and they would be strolling Heaven knew how far, in the dusk and chill of the deserted, elm-shaded streets. Mrs. Glave gathered her pale draperies about her with a little disgusted gesture, as if to leave the room that had disappointed her. The smooth silk, worn to limpness, still at its latter end hung gracefully. Rhoda Glave always wore a dress forever, until it seemed to be a kind of uniform. Once in five years, when she appeared in something new, you felt as if the leopard had changed his spots. Then you got used to her in that — *e da capo*.

Roland Glave's library, in which his wife now stood, was in its quality not unlike his wife's dress. It looked much worn, used to the last shred; but in the composition of its elements a high standard had prevailed. Evidently the Glaves couldn't put up with bad things; they would go without, or they would wear their possessions to bits, but they wouldn't compromise beyond the bounds of decency. Nothing was patched, but everything was very, very thin. A similar record was written on Rhoda Glave's face for any one to read — all in noble phrases of resignation and mirth. She had had her day — like the frock, like the room — but she had lasted better. The

<sup>1</sup> From *The Great Tradition*, by Katherine Fullerton Gerould. Copyright, 1915, by Charles Scribner's Sons. By permission of the publishers.



play of her features was not over. Her chestnut hair sprang vividly up from her forehead; the hand that held her short silken train was firm and white. She held her head high — would always hold it high, one would have surmised. She had the look of a woman who has prepaid the importunate piper.

Rhoda Glave's gesture of disgust was only incipient. She let her soft, shabby draperies fall, and stood for an instant before a faded chair into which presently she sank. Her firm fingers rested on a book, but she did not take it up. Instead, she arranged herself slowly in a comfortable position, then clasped her hands behind her head and stared before her into the half-dead fire. Relaxed, but poised — a typical attitude — she began to think. . . .

Good old Haysthorpe! He had been a classmate of Roland's, and his half-melancholy, half-cynical presence, his slight limp, his comfortable, safe income which he had never tried to increase, though with his relations it would have been so easy, had been familiar facts of all her married life. He had loyally taken her over, as she had loyally taken him. He wasn't there very often — he was usually wandering about the earth — but whenever he was, she found him welcome. Veils dropped away when he came. Oh, she *liked* Haysthorpe. He gave them both the re-quickened sense of their own brilliant beginning. Whatever else he was cynical about, he was never cynical about them. He took their romance delicately for granted; and admitted that, peerless though Roland might be among men, he had been well mated in his bride. Oh, for Haysthorpe, Rhoda reflected, they might have been a constellation! It was something to be fixed for one pair of eyes in the vivid firmament. Yes, Haysthorpe had been wonderful; and he might walk Roland as far as he liked — she would

not complain; though this wife of fifteen years' standing, the mother of four children, still found no use for her fine eyes comparable with that of resting on her husband's face. She didn't grudge anything to Haysthorpe, but it wasn't to be expected that she should prefer having her rare late-evening moments bereft of their luminary. She wanted Roland in — she always wanted him in. A roof existed, to her mind, to shelter him, and a roof not thus occupied hadn't much dignity. By the way, the actual roof of the kitchen had leaked in yesterday's rain — they must see the plumber. Rhoda smiled to herself at the imagery life imposed. Plumbers and constellations!

Why didn't they come back? This prolonged stroll — slow, of course, to humor Haysthorpe's limp — was like the old, lavish days before the children came, when time, if it was money, was at least golden and not mere slippery change. Roland had been pot-boiling even then, but boiling the pot wasn't so bad if only you didn't have to boil it all the time — and stir, stir, stir, as it boiled, until your arm ached. Of course, Roland hadn't it in him to do anything without a *cachet* of its own; but the fact remained that he reviewed other men's books, passed judgment on other men's policies, worked at other men's behests for whatever they decided to give him. His reputation was, in its way, unique; but he had never had time to stamp his impression home on the world at large — the world that pays. He was a genius, poor darling, but a genius-of-all-work. The thing he did best was the thing for which he got no pay at all: he talked superlatively.

After college Roland Glave had flung all his tiny inheritance into a traveller's purse, and had gone round the world. He had gone with modern speed and comfort; yet he seemed to have swung out to the horizon in a glorious galleon, to have

searched the seas to a sound of music, and to have brought home rich argosies of anecdote and fable. Rhoda remembered the vivid months after his return, when they had fallen in love with each other. His talk was in the grand manner, *voilà tout*; and if he was as poor as he was adored, what did it matter? There was no fatal fleck of egotism on his brilliance. He had done whatever dignified, ill-paying thing came to hand, done it faithfully, cheerfully, and a little whimsically. They hadn't been able to pluck the flowers of his talent, because they had always needed the fruit; but they had never been sordid, and they had never consented for a moment to believe that the glittering material chance mightn't come. If it hadn't been for the children — Rhoda caught her breath as the last log fell down to ashes — well, if it hadn't been for their children, they would have had enough to renew the cup of adventure, to keep it always brimming and bubbling at their lips. They were well off, for two. They weren't well off, for six; and if anything connected with their marriage could have been sordid — it couldn't! — it would have been the fees for specialists and the absurdly monotonous way in which each child managed to combine its parents' poorest features. They had been too much in love not to want children; for each of them not privately and passionately to desire increase from that other fairest creature. No, there had never — Rhoda reiterated vehemently to herself — since the world began, been but one way. Even poor, dull, little, stammering Stanton — their only boy — was in the antique tradition. It was certainly very much in the antique tradition (Rhoda was apt to frame her sentiment in irony: apples of gold in pictures of silver) that your children should reproduce their ancestors rather than their parents. Poor little Stanton! How they had hovered over his cradle, and how resolutely, during

the years, had each refused to put into words the wonder that daily grew! How could Stanton be Roland's boy? How could he be Rhoda's son? The doctors all shook their heads over him — felt his back, looked in his throat, did all the things that cost so much. And still Stanton peered and stammered, and reacted to life with a simplicity that had in it nothing idyllic. Just a dear, pathetically dull, and mysteriously ailing child. . . . And the little girls: they were well-mannered — of course! but they might have been anybody's children. No one, Rhoda thought, as she sat waiting for the two men, would ever have taken them for Roland Glave's. Chin in hand, for a change, she reflected on the odd usury of romance. "It's worth everything," she said silently; "and that is probably why it charges you a hundred per cent."

And then she heard Haysthorpe's uneven step and her husband's voice. Nearly two; what *had* they been talking of? She rose to greet them. No time to-night to put the problem of Stanton. Roland would be tired, and she knew as well as he what a pile of books had to be got through with on the morrow. But Haysthorpe was not to be blamed, ever; and the new problem about Stanton could wait. Strange, pitiful little Stanton!

"Rhoda!" Glave's fine Roman features (small wonder that Haysthorpe mocked him with "Petronius Arbiter"!) grew gravely bright. "Did you stay up for us? I thought you would have been asleep long since."

"I finished Peggy's dress for the birthday party, and you know what a duffer I am at sewing. Then I came down for conversation, and waited up for sheer curiosity to see what Geoffrey had done with you." Even to Haysthorpe she couldn't, just then, mention Stanton as a problem.

"The most extraordinary things!" Glave exclaimed. "Haven't you, Haysthorpe?"

"Apparently." Haysthorpe stood by the fire; but neither its warmth nor exercise in the night air brought any tinge into his colorless face. His pallor was natural; the pallor almost of alabaster, beneath his smooth fair hair. He had, too, save for his intimates, a marble manner; so that, altogether, a world given to stupid epithets could not be much blamed for calling him cold. "Apparently, Rhoda. I've startled him, at all events, into tremendous form."

"Form! You startled me into sheer delirium. I must have been a spectacle! Rhoda, dear, why did you stay away all the evening?"

"I waited as long as I could, and when Rhoda didn't come —" Haysthorpe began, apologetically.

"It was really my last minute for Peggy's dress," sighed Rhoda. She knew from Roland's look that he had genuinely missed her; that whatever Haysthorpe had imparted was something he hadn't wanted to taste alone. She didn't like missing Roland himself "in tremendous form." He was so good; no one could know so well as she how good he was. He could talk you into the midst of the Pleiades, whisk you up to the verge of Saturn. *She* knew. Fifteen years of marriage — marriage which is happiness in the form of the fugue! — had taught her patience but had whetted her appetite. Peggy's dress seemed like the finger of Fate. The children (bless them!) took so much time — wasted so much, if it came to that. Whatever they did, they seemed to do with a happy eye on eternity.

"I must go to bed now," said Rhoda; "but you might tell me in three words."

"Oh, three words!" protested Haysthorpe. "Look how



long it's taken me. But . . . how would 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' do?"

" 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,' " she repeated. "Oh, if it's just another epigram you've been polishing on Roland—"

"Let it go at 'Liberty,'" sang out Glave. "Geoffrey has chartered a yacht for the Hesperides, and puts us in command, with the kiddies for cargo. He's off to Cimmeria, himself."

Haysthorpe left the fire, limped across to Rhoda, and took her hands in his.

"It's only that it's been my luck, my dear, to put him and adventure together in a phrase that told. The Great Person liked the phrase, and has always been in private moments a serious admirer of Roland's. Why not make one of the private moments public? I suggested it. He caught on like wild-fire. I answered for our boy up to the hilt. . . . You see, I *do* sometimes dine out with my relatives. And now you two have really only to decide."

"What is it?" Her cleverness seemed all to have deserted her. She beat wildly in a bright fog of conjecture.

"A perfectly good, though naturally very small, diplomatic post. Minister to Something-or-other with a lovely climate, where you can afford twenty servants and pick your food, in courses, off the trees. Not a thing for Glave to do, really, but produce masterpieces, and now and then practise his impeccable Spanish on dignitaries. What price *that, madame l'ambassadrice?*" He smiled at her impassive face; then, as he bent to kiss her hand, whispered, "Look at him."

She did look at Glave, and caught her breath. Never but once before had she seen that light in his eyes — the eyes of a man who stands face to face with Fortune, breasting her smile. Fifteen years before, she had caught her breath in the same way. All these years she had thought of it as a light

that passes with youth. But . . . even Haysthorpe's colorless face reflected it now with a faint lunar glow.

She could not speak, yet every instant that she delayed, she knew, would make her reply, when it came, more inadequate. At last she gave it up. "Dear Geoffrey," she murmured, laying her hand on his arm for an instant. Then she stood before her husband. Him she did not touch — for all Haysthorpe, their common tensivity could melt only into a straining embrace. She flung her head back — deliberately; she was sure she smiled. "*It is Hesperia!*" she cried. "But I can't say things to-night. We'll talk all day to-morrow. And there, you dears, are your whiskey and your soda. You understand?"

They did understand, their faces assured her, and she fled. They didn't, poor darlings, but she would go quickly to her own room and light her bale-fires there, if need be.

In spite of Rhoda's gallant prophecy, all the next day couldn't, of course, go in talk. There were the children's lessons — next year they hoped to afford a school for Peggy and Julia at least, but this year Stanton had eaten up, month by month, the fluctuating balance; there was the birthday party, for which they had to be dressed and to which they had to be taken; there was the fatal plumber — two of him, as always, to upset the kitchen and demoralize the cook. On Roland's side, there were the books that couldn't wait, and that had to be looked at, at least, before they could be reviewed. Not until evening — and even then Roland was still in the library, tackling the last of the hysterical group — could she sit down with Haysthorpe and beg for details.

"Roland and I haven't dared to begin," she explained. "Everything would have gone by the board if we had once started on — '*Hesperia*.' It's had to wait — but here we are."

"Couldn't he chuck the trash for one day? Especially now that —"

Rhoda smiled. "I'm afraid not even now. And my trash certainly couldn't be chucked. Besides —" She hesitated. They must seem ungrateful. Of course, Roland would have chucked anything for a day, if she had asked him to. If she could only explain to Haysthorpe that her delaying, so easily made to seem of necessity, was half cowardice, half sheer aching mercy for Roland and the vision in which, for a few hours, he was walking! She knew — she read it in his every gesture — that it wasn't so bad even to write reviews of inferior novels with a pen perhaps destined to trace his own masterpiece some day in Hesperia. How much, she wondered, could she, in loyalty, say to Haysthorpe? It wasn't loyal, of course, to say anything to him that hadn't first been said, or implied, to Roland. The whole question was: how much had Roland inferred from her few hesitating phrases? Perhaps everything. If they could only find a way out! Perhaps she was morbid; too much given to scenting frustration in every new wind that blew. It was a little her habit to read life too personally; to believe superstitiously that because she had so much, she couldn't, in mere mathematics, have any more. Fate didn't give you Roland *and* Hesperia, she reasoned. She did not stop to ask whether Fate couldn't perhaps give Roland both Hesperia and her. That would have been stupid juggling; modesty aside, she knew what she meant to Roland. Besides, it was always too easy to see him as doomed by his very beauty. Yet it wasn't a moment for superstition; it was a moment for all the humor one had.

"It's hard to take life at its word," she threw out, as she groped.

"Oh, if ever two people played fair with life, it's you. You needn't be afraid, Rhoda."

His face was all kindness. He didn't think them ungrateful. He trusted them. Dear Haysthorpe!

"You haven't had any time, really, have you?" he went on. "I kept Roland up until three, I confess. I have to go tomorrow, you know."

Rhoda wavered. "Only five minutes — while he was shaving. He couldn't say much!" She laughed. "And the children have been about. We can't discuss it before them. They would begin to pack their little trunks — and that *would* be a mess to clear up!" Still she wavered, but her resolve was beginning to harden. She went on, in another tone. She heard, herself, that her tone had changed. It reassured her.

"I said to him that we must think hard. The children, I mean. . . . Of course there couldn't be any question for Roland or me. It *is* liberty."

"I've always thought, you know," said Haysthorpe slowly, "that Roland had more than one string to his bow. He's got so much history and politics and sociology stowed away. Wendell realized that. He had read the 'Contemporary Essays.' It's a little place, but in these days even little places are important — anything may happen overnight, with Japan and Germany going such a pace. If he made good — and that's only a question of opportunity — he would be in the direct line for some of the better places. I don't mean the biggest capitals — the retreats for superannuated millionaires — but the important minor posts."

"Oh, I know, I know!" Hadn't she spent the hours from two to seven that morning thinking of the magnificent chance it would be for her magnificent mate? She could have believed diplomacy invented in the dawn of time for the sake of being justified in the twentieth century by Roland Glave. There

was no limit to Rhoda's deterministic power to read all history in the light of her special revelation.

"Of course you know, my dear. But I couldn't help saying it. And I think Roland himself feels that. Gad! If you could have heard him talk last night out in the open! He oughtn't to be sacrificed as he has been all these years. Wherever he is, he's really at the top; but he ought to be so visibly at the top that fools have to crane their necks. I don't know what *The Cosmic Review* will do without him, but I'd jolly well like to see. Didn't even have the sense to give him the editorship when old What's-his-name died!"

"You can't blame them. He *would* have run it into the ground, you know. Think of the articles he wouldn't have printed!" Rhoda fell into the old laughing tolerance for a moment. *The Cosmic* might have been an ant-hill and they good-natured strollers.

Haysthorpe smiled absently. He seemed to be thinking. "Do you really mean it seriously about the children? Is it their dreadful little education that's worrying you?"

"Geoffrey, how can you?" She spoke lightly, but her eyes were fixed, as if on a great incoming wave. "I shan't worry about their education so long as they have the privilege of living under their father's roof. And you don't need to be told that it's much better luck for dear little girls with no particular brains to be the daughters of a United States minister *anywhere*, than to go even to the schools we can't afford."

"Stanton, then?"

The great incoming wave had broken now in spray all about her. She had to struggle to keep her footing. To run was impossible. Quickly she decided. It would have to be said to-morrow, if not to-night; and perhaps Geoffrey could make it easier for Roland if he knew. Yet she blamed herself bit-



terly both for her cowardice and her mercy, that had somehow caused her to let Haysthorpe have the fact in its crudity before she had done more than hint it to Roland. She would go to Roland at once, of course; and then he and Haysthorpe could have it out. The morrow, she knew, would bring her the old routine; since, though with such good excuse, she had faked it all day, there was no hope now of the proper sequence. But the violated etiquette — never before violated by her — of the supreme human relation seemed to her monstrous. The notion of telling even Geoffrey first!

"Listen, Geoffrey. Roland, you know, had been away for a week before he joined you in town and brought you down. Otherwise I shouldn't be doing this ugly thing. It *is* ugly — perhaps I had better go to him now." She rose unsteadily.

Haysthorpe's hand pushed her gently back into her chair. "You're incapable of doing anything ugly, Rhoda. Something's troubling you that you haven't yet let Roland in on. That's it, isn't it?"

She nodded.

"Something you'd have to tell me, anyhow?"

"Oh, yes, at once."

"It's all right, my dear girl. Tell me now, while Roland's finishing, and then go straight to him. It's I, with my proposition, that have somehow made the thing so hard to tell him — I can see that. Or you'd have dragged him off yesterday, the minute we got in."

She nodded again. "Oh, yesterday, I thought it could wait." She added bitterly: "I thought it had better wait until you had gone. And now it comes to my telling you first!"

Haysthorpe leaned forward, moving into the light. His tense face gleamed at her.

"Listen, Rhoda. You shall do whatever you think is right — of course. But remember this: neither one of us gives a fig for the other compared with Roland. I'd chuck you, as you'd chuck me, any day, for him. Well, then, we can't be doing anything very dreadful. And I rather think, you know, since you have to tell me anyhow, you'd better tell me now. There's so little time. Between us, we might go over the ground and think of some way out — something to make it easier for him. He'll need it, Rhoda — he'll need it. And you need to tell. I can see that, you poor dear." No trace of the marble manner now.

"It may seem to you sordid — unreasonable," she began. "You've no children."

He showed her a white grimace. "No, thank God!"

"It's nothing to thank God for, Geoffrey." The wave had ebbed now, and she stood firm upon the sands. "Quite the contrary," she pursued resolutely. "Only I know what poor, darling little Stanton must seem to you, set beside Roland." ("And to me" were the words that followed in her voiceless heart.) "But Stanton is there; and while Roland was off shooting last week, Dr. Tuck sent for me. He doesn't know; he can't promise or prophesy; but the chances are that Stanton will have to have a bad operation — perhaps two or three, in the next years. It's all very complicated and obscure — Roland will have to see Dr. Tuck, and make out more than I could — but everything depends on his being set straight. He'll have to be watched, and at the first sign of certain symptoms he'll have to be rushed off to Moorfeldt. He's at a critical age, apparently. 'There's nothing to do but wait,' Dr. Tuck said; 'you're very fortunate to be near New York, where Moorfeldt could have him at once.' And for a long time — even if everything comes right — he will be very, very delicate. And you

see" — all her misery was in her cry — "Stanton must have his chance."

Haysthorpe had risen while she was speaking, and as she finished he stood with his back to her, looking out through the dark window.

"What about Roland's chance?" he said thickly.

"You ask *me* that?"

"I was asking Omniscience, Rhoda, not you."

For a moment there was silence, silence quite unbroken by any reply from Omniscience. At last Haysthorpe turned back to her. "Have you told Roland anything?"

"Only that, in this connection, I was worried about Stanton. Dr. Tuck sent for me quite unexpectedly. Roland could hardly guess — except that, of course, we've always had to worry about Stanton. And now," she said after a little pause, "I think I must go to Roland. Poor darling!"

"Wait!" Haysthorpe's hand shot up. "Before you go, I want you to think. You needn't, just because you're a mother, mind my asking you to think. You're the best woman I've ever known — if that is any comfort to you for what I'm going to say. *Are you sure you are right?* I love Stanton, too — always have loved the little beggar since I stood beside him at the christening font. I'd love any son of you two. But if it's between him and Roland, Roland's worth twice Stanton — worth a hundred times Stanton, either to me or in the open market. And this strikes me as being Roland's last big chance. I don't suggest your doing anything brutal or bad. But couldn't you leave Stanton here? Isn't there any one who would love the boy and see him through? God knows I'd do it myself if I were up to it."

"No one is up to that, Geoffrey, except his father and his mother. Stanton's not old enough to understand the situation,

but he's old enough to have his heart broken. And they can break ours from the day they're born!" She bit back the emotion that surged up and phrased itself. "There isn't any one, Geoffrey, and he isn't strong enough for school. Just as a practical proposition, it's impossible. There's no question but that Roland will see it in the same way."

"Is Tuck sure of saving the boy?"

She shook her head. "No. He's not sure of anything except that it will take all that any of us can do to give him just a fighting chance."

"Would you let Roland go on ahead for a time without you?"

She looked at him gravely. "I shall propose that to him, of course. But I doubt if we could afford it."

His sternness melted. "Rhoda," he cried, "please understand! I'm a beast to put you on the rack like this, but I just can't help fighting to get out of the net. Here is one of the best minds of our time — we both know that — and since it has come to maturity, it has never had freedom. It isn't for myself I want Roland a great man; it's for the world. Let clods mate and go under for the sake of their offspring. I defy anybody's offspring — even his own! — to be so important as Roland Glave. You think I wish ill to poor little Stanton — I don't. But I don't wish to see Roland despoiled for Stanton's problematical sake. I don't see what the world gets out of that. The bird in the hand is worth all four in the bush, if it comes to that. And you know as well as I do that this is practically a question of Roland's future. It's because the day's so late, and it's all so damnably important, that I'm behaving like this. To have Roland go under because he mayn't live anywhere but on some specialist's front stoop! . . . I love you both, and this thing is making me sick enough to die. What

it's doing to you I don't even dare to think, my poor, dear Rhoda!"

Rhoda Glave had covered her face with her hand. "I have said all that over to myself so many times in the last years, Geoffrey, that I can't even feel the impulse to tell you not to apologize, to tell you that I understand. Could a woman be Roland's wife and not feel as you do about it? You are bitter against me —"

He shook his head. "I am not."

She went on, still holding her hand over her eyes. "You are bitter against me, Geoffrey, because you believe that every woman is just a lioness crouching beside her cubs. You think I'm following some brainless instinct. It's a thing you've never faced for yourself, and so you fall back on all the old fables. I couldn't explain to you, if I would, how mistaken you are about me — and I wouldn't if I could. I don't understand any better than you what Nature is up to — with her birds in the bush. I know that Stanton isn't equal to Roland — not even with Peggy and Julia and Marian thrown in. It seems to me that I must know it better even than you do. But it somehow doesn't change anything."

She let her hand fall, and rose. "I am going to Roland now. I shall tell him as briefly as possible what Dr. Tuck told me, and that I've had to let you know. Then I shall send him straight to you." She looked Haysthorpe between the eyes. "I give you my word, and I shan't be induced to break it. You can count on me. If there is any way under heaven in which you can work on Roland to make him go, I shall think you the better man for trying it."

She moved to the door. As she passed his chair, she bent over and touched his forehead with her fingers. "We don't understand any better than you do, Geoffrey," she murmured.



"The only difference between us is that we accept it and you don't."

"You absolutely speak for him?" He detained her one more instant.

"I won't touch him, Geoffrey. I give him to you. You have my word. But I know." She closed the door softly behind her.

It was a relief — could not be otherwise — when Geoffrey, his white face looking strangely gray and ghastly as he came out into the sunless afternoon, limped down the walk to his cab. All three showed the strain of the sleepless night and the dreary morning with the pitiless convention of its routine, in which the skilful silences and the tactful chatter, before children and servants, had been interruptions that did not help. Rhoda Glave had kept her word to Haysthorpe. Roland had come to him ten minutes after she left. Upstairs in her own room, Rhoda, watch in hand, gave them an interminable hour. She dreaded going down to them as, she believed, she had never dreaded anything before; yet no hour had ever seemed so long. It was like bringing the weight of Stanton into the world again, she thought; only this time with knowledge instead of hope. Before she went down she looked in the mirror, smoothed her hair, cooled her temples with *eau de cologne*, powdered the deep blue circles under her eyes, lifted her head high, smiled courage at her own blurred reflection — performed all the pathetic, vain ritual of feminine preparation. A moment later, without knocking, she entered the room.

Immediately Glave's arm was about her and Glave's smile was full upon her face; though he finished his sentence to Haysthorpe before he spoke to her. Even then it was only "Sit down, dear — here," and he went on talking as if she

had been there from the beginning. She rejoiced in the warmth of his perfect inclusion of her in himself, as if it had been fear of separation that numbed her. She had been sure, as she told Geoffrey; but there was unspeakable comfort in feeling sure there by his side, in watching him feel as she felt, react as she reacted — in having only to listen, as it were, to hear herself speak with Roland's golden tongue. That had been the supreme symbol to her always of their marriage: her joy of listening to him as to her own inmost convictions phrased by a god. And now, though the matter was so sad — though the god was phrasing their doom — her mated self was once more at peace. She did not need Haysthorpe's haggard "He sees it as you do, Rhoda," to find all her pity spending itself on poor Geoffrey, who with rage unspeakable had seen his miracle fail before his eyes. He was like — her weary but irrepressible fancy told her — a Jacobite noble pleading with a Pretender.

The talk had gone on for hours; and always Dr. Tuck recurred like some devil out of the machine. They couldn't get away from the fact; they couldn't get away from the situation. By midnight they seemed, to Rhoda's tired brain, petrified into a symbolic group: Geoffrey hoarse with the amount of bitter common sense he had talked, she and Roland fixed for all time in some mythological attitude of parenthood — something for archæologists to interpret. It wasn't that they didn't long to be delivered from their Laokoönesque posture; they dealt in figures, in probabilities, in symptoms, in metaphors, in every known language, while Stanton — little, frustrating Stanton, the frail fruit of their flesh, the goal of their desire — slept ignorantly above. Each practical suggestion of Haysthorpe's — sometimes fantastic in its conception of concrete possibilities — brought to Rhoda an unreal hope

that died as soon as she turned the eye of reason on it. Once — with a quick first look, as of an accomplice, at Haysthorpe — she asked quietly: "Could you perhaps go without me, Roland, leaving me to follow when I could?"

She had proved herself a woman of her word; which was her sole compensation for the accent of his "Rhoda! Never!"

As for Glave, he had perhaps never heard so many superlatives lavished upon himself as in that hour. Haysthorpe let him have it straight: all the praise that he had garnered during the years from others, and kept in his loyal, inarticulate heart, poured forth in a golden stream. Glave flushed beneath it, and caught helplessly at Rhoda's hand. Yet he might have felt some justice in it, some belated compensation for incommensurate rewards; for he only said, "Even so, Geoffrey, the situation isn't changed. If you give 'hostages to Fortune' — well, you've your duty to your hostages. Ask any army man." And once, when Geoffrey was treating the black future in the epic manner, he turned to Rhoda almost with amusement. "My dear, does he think we don't know *that*?"

So it had gone, through hours, until Geoffrey, broken and beaten, took his candle and went to his room. Rhoda, as she stood in the door, put her hands on his shoulders. "Geoffrey, Geoffrey," she whispered, "Roland's above everything; but do you think this is easy for me?"

"I think it will kill you, in the end," he answered. "You don't, either of you, seem to see what I'm pleading for — the survival of the fittest. You treat me like a blasphemer."

For the first and last time in her life Rhoda Glave bent and kissed Geoffrey Haysthorpe's cheek. "No, Geoffrey dear, no," she said. "We love you more than we ever loved you before."

If it was a relief when Geoffrey went, it was still more of a

relief when night closed in, when the young voices were still, and Roland Glave and his wife were left alone. They had much to go over; much separate talk on the part of each with Hays-thorpe to be recounted; much sad and quiet discussion of the meagre, authoritative words of Dr. Tuck; much quick planning of the terrifyingly expensive future; much tender, atoning mention of Stanton himself. The little girls were forgotten — Hesperia would have done well enough for them! Both knew that bitter reactions would come; Glave braced himself, in the intervals, to the sub-editorship that his sensitive independence had long refused; Rhoda saw, in the silent instants, white hospital cots and the cheerful masks of nurses. . . . Both clung to the slight exaltation left them, made conscious afresh of the numbered years. At the end Rhoda drew near to her husband.

"I was glad, in a way, to have Geoffrey say it to me," she said. "I've so often felt it without daring to say it. Nature is a terrible futurist — and I'm not. Nothing is worth your chance to me. It seems like madness to give it up. My brain can't justify us. Once it seemed the most beautiful thing in the world for you to be repeated in human form. Now I know you can't be. In a thousand years nothing will happen so good as you. We're not even gambling. But it's the way we chose . . ."

"It's the way we chose," he repeated firmly.

"The world won't thank us," she went on. "What will, I wonder?" Not the deaf generations, she thought to herself, to which we all sacrifice.

"Not Geoffrey," she heard Glave saying. "He will never understand. But he will always love us just the same. He'll have to. We haven't answered him. Life has answered him. Call it God, if you must. . . . I'm awfully tired."

"Tired, my darling?" Her drooping head rose with the old quick gesture.

"Not really tired, my own. No, never *really* tired!"

They clasped each other, so utterly at one that even Hesperia seemed a mere trick of the sunlight upon the sea.



## BREAD<sup>1</sup>

By JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

### I

THE train rolling rapidly over the broad salt meadows thunderously entered the long shed of the terminal at the sea. August Turnbull rose from his seat in the Pullman smoking compartment and took down the coat hanging beside him. It was gray flannel; in a waistcoat his shirt sleeves were a visible heavy mauve silk, and there was a complication of gold chains about his lower pockets. Above the coat a finely woven Panama hat with a narrow brim had rested, and with that now on his head he moved arrogantly toward the door.

He was a large man, past the zenith of life, but still vigorous in features and action. His face was full, and, wet from the heat, he mopped it with a heavy linen handkerchief. August Turnbull's gaze was steady and light blue; his nose was so heavy that it appeared to droop a little from sheer weight, almost resting on the mustache brushed out in a horizontal line across prominent lips; while his neck swelled in a glowing congestion above a wilting collar.

He nodded to several men in the narrow corridor of the car; men like himself in luxurious summer clothes, but for the most part fatter; then in the shed, looking about in vain for Bernard, his son-in-law, he proceeded to the street, where his automobile was waiting. It was a glittering landaulet, folded back and open. Thrusting a wadded evening paper into a crevice he

<sup>1</sup> From *The Happy End*, by Joseph Hergesheimer. Reprinted by permission of, and by special arrangement with, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. authorized publishers.

sank in an upholstered corner while his chauffeur skillfully worked out through a small confusion of similar motor activity. Before him a carved glass vase set in a bracket held smilax and yellow rosebuds, and he saw on the floor a fallen gold powder box.

Picking it up his face was suffused by a darker tide; this was the result of stooping and the angry realization that in spite of his prohibition Louise had been using the landaulet again. She must be made to understand that he, her father, had an absolute authority over his family and property. Marriage to Bernard Foster did not relieve her from obedience to the head of the house. Bernard had a car as well as himself; yet August Turnbull knew that his son-in-law — at heart a stingy man — encouraged her to burn the parental gasoline in place of his own. Turned against the public Bernard's special quality was admirable; he was indeed more successful, richer than August had been at the other's age; but Louise and her husband would have to recognize his precedence.

They were moving faster now on a broad paved avenue bound with steel tracks. A central business section was left for a more unpretentious region — small open fruit and fish stands, dingy lodging places, drab corner saloons, with, at the intervals of the cross streets, fleet glimpses of an elevated boardwalk and the luminous space of the sea. Though the day was ending there was no thinning of the vaporous heat, and a sodden humanity, shapeless in bathing suits, was still reluctantly moving away from the beach.

Groups of women with their hair in trailing wet wisps and short uneven skirts dripping on the pavements, gaunt children in scant haphazard garb surged across the broad avenue or with shrill admonishments stood in isolated helpless patches amid the swift and shining procession of automobiles.

August Turnbull was disturbed by the sudden arrest of his progress, and gazing out saw the insignificant cause of delay. He had again removed his hat and a frown drew a visible heavy line between his eyes.

"More police are needed for these crossings," he complained to the chauffeur, "there is the same trouble every evening. The city shouldn't encourage such rabbles; they give the place a black eye."

All the immediate section, he silently continued, ought to be torn down and rebuilt in solid expensive structures. It made him hot and uncomfortable just to pass through the shabby quarter. The people in it were there for the excellent reason that they lacked the ambition, the force to demand better things. They got what they deserved.

August Turnbull made an impatient movement of contempt; the world, success, was for the strong men, the men who knew what they wanted and drove for it in a straight line. There was a great deal of foolishness in the air at present — the war was largely responsible; though, on the other hand, the war would cure a lot of nonsense. But America in particular was rotten with sentimentality; it was that mainly which had involved them here in a purely European affair. Getting into it had been bad business.

Nowhere was the nation's failing more evident than in the attitude toward women. It had always been maudlin; and now, long content to use their advantages in small ways, women would become a serious menace to the country generally. He had admitted their economic value — they filled every possible place in the large establishment of the Turnbull Bakery; rather, they performed all the light manual labor. There they were more satisfactory than men, more easily controlled — yes, and cheaper. But in Congress, voting, women

in communities reporting on factory conditions were a dangerous nuisance.

He had left the poorer part, and the suavity of the succeeding streets rapidly increased to a soothing luxury. Wide cottages occupied velvet-green lawns, and the women he saw were of the sort he approved — closely skirted creatures with smooth shoulders in transparent *crêpe de Chine*. They invited a contemplative eye, the thing for which they were created — a pleasure for men; that and maternity.

The automobile turned toward the sea and stopped at his house midway in the block. It was a square dwelling painted white with a roof of tapestry slate, and broad awning-covered veranda on the sea. A sprinkler was flashing on the lawn, dripping over the concrete pavement and filling the air with a damp coolness. No one was visible and, leaving his hat and coat on a chair in an airy hall furnished in black wicker and flowery chintz hangings on buff walls, he descended to the basement dressing rooms.

In his bathing suit he presented a figure of vigorous glowing well-being. Only the silvering hair at his temples, the fatty bulge across the back of his neck, and a considerable stomach indicated his multiplying years. He left by a lower door, and immediately after was on the sand. The tide was out, the lowering sun obscured in a haze, and the sea undulated with a sullen gleam. Two men were swimming, and farther at the left a woman stood in the water with arms raised to her head. It was cold, but August Turnbull marched out without hesitation and threw himself forward with an uncompromising solid splash.

He swam adequately, but he had not progressed a dozen feet before he was conscious of a strong current sweeping him up the beach, and he regained his feet with an angry flourish.

The other men came nearer, and he recognized Bernard Foster, his son-in-law, and Frederick Rathe, whose cottage was directly across the street from the Turnbulls'.

Like August they were big men, with light hair and eyes. They were very strong and abrupt in their movements, they spoke in short harsh periods, and fingered mustaches waxed and rolled into severe points.

"A gully has cut in above," Bernard explained, indicating a point not far beyond them; "it's over your head. Watch where you swim." They were moving away.

"Are you coming over to dinner?" August Turnbull called to Bernard.

"Can't," the latter shouted; "Victorine is sick again. Too many chocolate sundaes."

Left alone, August dived and floated until he was thoroughly cooled; then he turned toward the beach. The woman, whose existence he had forgotten, was leaving at the same time. She approached at an angle, and he was admiring her slim figure when he realized that it was Miss Beggs, his wife's companion. He had never seen her in a bathing suit before. August Turnbull delayed until she was at his side.

"Good evening." Her voice was low, and she scarcely lifted her gaze from the sand.

He wondered why — she had been in his house for a month — he had failed completely to notice her previously. He decided that it had been because she was so pale and quiet. Ordinarily he didn't like white cheeks; and then she had been deceptive; he had subconsciously thought of her as thin.

She stopped and took off her rubber cap, performing that act slowly, while her body, in wet satin, turned like a faultless statue of glistening black marble.

"Do you enjoy bathing in the ocean?" he asked.



A momentary veiled glance accompanied her reply. "Yes," she said; "though I can't swim. I like to be beaten by the waves. I like to fight against them."

She hesitated, then fell definitely back; and he was forced to walk on alone.

His wife's companion! With the frown once more scoring the line between his eyes he satirically contrasted Miss Beggs, a servant really, and Emmy.

## II

His room occupied the front corner on the sea, Emmy's was beyond; the door between was partly open and he could hear her moving about, but with a cigarette and his hair-brushes he made no acknowledgment of her presence. The sun was now no more than a diffused gray glow, the sea like unstirred molten silver. The sound of the muffled gong that announced dinner floated up the stairs.

Below, the damask was lit both by rose silk-shaded candles and by the radiance of a suspended alabaster bowl. August Turnbull sat at the head of a table laden with silver and crystal and flowers. There were individual pepper mills — he detested adulterated or stale spices — carved goblets for water, cock-tail glasses with enameled roosters, ruby goblets like blown flowers and little gilt-speckled liqueur glasses; there were knives with steel blades, knives all of silver, and gold fruit knives; there were slim oyster forks, entrée forks of solid design, and forks of filigree; a bank of spoons by a plate that would be presently removed, unused, for other filled plates.

Opposite him Emmy's place was still empty, but his son, Morice, in the olive drab and bar of a first lieutenant, together with his wife, was already present. August was annoyed by any delay: one of the marks of a properly controlled house-

hold, a house admirably conscious of the importance of order — and obedience — was an utter promptness at the table. Then, silent and unsubstantial as a shadow, Emmy Turnbull slipped into her seat.

August gazed at her with the secret resentment more and more inspired by her sickness. At first he had been merely dogmatic — she must recover under the superlative advice and attention he was able to summon for her. Then his impatience had swung about toward all doctors — they were a pack of incompetent fools, medicine was nothing more than an organized swindle. They had tried baths, cures, innumerable infallible treatments — to no purpose. Finally he had given up all effort, all hope; he had given her up. And since then it had been difficult to mask his resentment.

The butler, a white jacket taking the place of the conventional somber black, poured four cocktails from a silver mixer and placed four dishes of shaved ice, lemon rosettes and minute pinkish clams before August Turnbull, Morice and his wife, and Miss Beggs, occupying in solitude a side of the table. Then he set at Mrs. Turnbull's hand a glass of milk thinned with lime water and an elaborate platter holding three small pieces of zwieback.

She could eat practically nothing.

It was the particular character of her state that specially upset August Turnbull. He was continually affronted by the spectacle of Emmy seated before him sipping her diluted milk, breaking her dry bread, in the midst of the rich plenty he provided. Damn it, he admitted, it got on his nerves.

The sting of the cocktail whipped up his eagerness for the iced tender clams. His narrowed gaze rested on Emmy; she was actually seven years older than he, but from her appearance she might be a hundred, a million. There was noth-

ing but her painfully slow movements to distinguish her from a mummy.

The plates were again removed and soup brought on, a clear steaming amber-green turtle, and with it crisp wheat rolls. Morice's wife gave a sigh of satisfaction at the latter.

"My," she said, "they're elegant! I'm sick and tired of war bread."

She was a pinkish young woman with regular features and abundant coppery hair. Marriage had brought her into the Turnbull family from the chorus of a famous New York roof beauty show. August had been at first displeased, then a certain complacency had possessed him — Morice, who was practically thirty years old, had no source of income other than that volunteered by his father, and it pleased the latter to keep them depending uncertainly on what he was willing to do. It insured just the attitude from Rosalie he most enjoyed, approved, in a youthful and not unhandsome woman. He liked her soft scented weight hanging on his arm and the perfumed kiss with which she greeted him in the morning.

Nevertheless, at times there was a gleam in her eyes and an expression at odds with the perfection of her submission; on several occasions Morice had approached him armed with a determination that he, August, knew had been injected from without, undoubtedly by Rosalie. Whatever it had been he quickly disposed of it, but there was a possibility that she might some day undertake a rebellion; and there was added zest in the thought of how he would totally subdue her.

"It's a wonder something isn't said to you," she continued. "They're awfully strict about wheat now."

"That," August Turnbull instructed her heavily, "is a subject we needn't pursue."

The truth was that he would permit no interference with

what so closely touched his comfort. He was not a horse to eat bran. His bakery — under inspection — conformed rigidly with the Government requirements; but he had no intention of spoiling his own dinners. Any necessary conservation could be effected at the expense of the riffraff through which he had driven coming from the station. Black bread was no new experience to them.

He saw that Miss Beggs' small white teeth were crushing salted cashew nuts. Noticing her in detail for the first time he realized that she enormously appreciated good food. Why in thunder, since she ate so heartily, didn't she get fat and rosy! She was one of the thin kind — yet not thin, he corrected himself. Graceful. Why, she must weigh a hundred and twenty-five pounds; and she wasn't tall.

The butler filled his ruby goblet from a narrow bottle of Rhine wine. It was exactly right, not sweet but full; and the man held for his choice a great platter of beef beautifully carved into thick crimson slices; the bloodlike gravy had collected in its depression and he poured it over his meat.

"A piece of this," he told Emmy discontentedly, "would set you right up; put something in your veins besides lime-water."

She became painfully upset at once and fumbled in her lap, with her face averted, as the attention of the table was momentarily directed at her. There was an uncontrollable tremor of her loose colorless mouth.

What a wife for him, August Turnbull! The stimulants and rich flavors and roast filled him with a humming vitality; he could feel his heart beat — as strong, he thought, as a bell. In a way Emmy had deceived him — she probably had always been fragile, but was careful to conceal it from him at their marriage. It was unjust to him. He wished that she would

take her farcical meals in her room, and not sit here — a skeleton at the feast. Positively it made him nervous to see her — spoiled his pleasure.

It had become worse lately; he had difficulty in putting her from his mind; he imagined Emmy in conjunction with the bakery, of her slowly starving and the thousands of loaves he produced in a day. There was something unnatural in such a situation; it was like a mockery at him.

A vision of her came to him at the most inopportune moments, lingering until it drove him into a hot rage and a pounding set up at the back of his neck.

The meat was brought back, and he had more of a sweet boiled huckleberry pudding. A salad followed, with a heavy Russian dressing. August Turnbull's breathing grew thicker, he was conscious of a familiar oppression. He assaulted it with fresh wine.

"I saw Bernard on the beach," he related; "Victorine is sick once more. Chocolate sundaes, Bernard said. She is always stuffing herself at soda-water counters or with candy. They oughtn't to allow it; the child should be made to eat at the table. When she is here she touches nothing but the dessert. When I was ten I ate everything or not at all. But there is no longer any discipline, not only with children but everywhere."

"There is a little freedom, though," Rosalie suggested.

His manner clearly showed displeasure, almost contempt, and he turned to Miss Beggs. "What do you think?" he demanded. "I understand you have been a school-teacher."

"Oh, you are quite right," she responded; "at least about children, and it is clear from them that most parents are idiotically lax." A blaze of discontent, loathing, surprisingly invaded her pallid face.



"A rod of iron," August recommended.

The contrast between his wife and Miss Beggs recurred, intensified — one an absolute wreck and the other as solidly slender as a birch tree. Fate had played a disgusting trick on him. In the prime of his life he was tied to a hopeless invalid. It put an unfair tension on him. Women were charming, gracious — or else they were nothing. If Emmy's money had been an assistance at first he had speedily justified its absorption in the business. She owed him, her husband, everything possible. He suddenly pictured mountains of bread, bread towering up into the clouds, fragrant and appetizing; and Emmy, a thing of bones, gazing wistfully at it. August Turnbull, with a feeling like panic, brushed the picture from his mind.

The dessert was apparently a bomb of frozen coffee, but the center revealed a delicious creamy substance flaked with pistache. The cold sweet was exactly what he craved, and he ate it rapidly in a curious mounting excitement. With the coffee he fingered the diminutive glass of golden brandy and a long dark roll of oily tobacco. He lighted this carefully and flooded his head with the coiling bluish smoke. Rosalie was smoking a cigarette — a habit in women which he noisily denounced. She extinguished it in an ash tray, but his anger lingered, an unreasoning exasperation that constricted his throat. Sharply aware of the sultriness of the evening he went hastily out to the veranda.

Morice following him with the evening paper volunteered, "I see German submarines are operating on the Atlantic coast."

His father asserted: "This country is due for a lesson. It was anxious enough to get into trouble, and now we'll find how it likes some severe instruction. All the news here is bluff —

the national asset. What I hope is that business won't be entirely ruined later."

"The Germans will get the lesson," Rosalie unexpectedly declared at his shoulder.

"You don't know what you're talking about," he replied decidedly. "The German system is a marvel, one of the wonders of civilization."

She turned away, lightly singing a line from one of her late numbers: "I've a Yankee boy bound for Berlin."

Morice stirred uneasily. "They got a Danish tanker somewhere off Nantucket," he continued impotently.

August Turnbull refused to be drawn into further speech; he inhaled his cigar with a replete bodily contentment. The oppression of dinner was subsiding. His private opinion of the war was that it would end without a military decision — he regarded the German system as unsmashable — and then, with France deleted and England swamped in internal politics, he saw an alliance of common sense between Germany and the United States. The present hysteria, the sentimentality he condemned, could not continue to stand before the pressure of mercantile necessity. After all, the entire country was not made up of fools.

Morice and his wife wandered off to the boardwalk, and he, August, must have fallen asleep, for he suddenly sat up with a sensation of strangeness and dizzy vision. He rose and shook it off. It was still light, and he could see Bernard at his automobile, parked before the latter's cottage.

The younger man caught sight of August at the same moment and called: "We are going to a café with the Rathes; will you come?"

He was still slightly confused, his head full, and the ride, the gayety of the crowd, he thought, would do him good.

"Be over for you," the other added; and later he was crowded into a rear seat between Louise, his daughter, and Caroline Rathe.

Louise was wearing the necklace of platinum and diamonds Bernard Foster had given her last Christmas. It was, August admitted to himself, a splendid present, and must have cost eighteen or twenty thousand dollars. The Government had made platinum almost prohibitive. In things of this kind — the adornment of his wife, of, really, himself, the extension of his pride — Bernard was extremely generous. It was in the small affairs such as gasoline that he was prudent.

Both Caroline Rathe and Louise were handsome women handsomely dressed; he was seated in a nest of soft tulle and ruffled embroidery, of pliant swaying bodies. Their satin-shod feet had high sharp insteps in films of black lace and their fingers glittered with prismatic stones. Bernard was in front with the chauffeur, and Frederick Rathe occupied a small seat at the knees of the three others. He had not made his money, as had August and Bernard, but inherited it with a huge brewery. Frederick was younger than the other men too; but his manner was, if anything, curter. He said things about the present war that made even August Turnbull uneasy.

He was an unusual youth, not devoted to sports and convivial pleasures — as any one might infer, viewing his heavy frame and wealth — but something of a reader. He quoted fragments from philosophical books about the will-to-power and the *Uebermensch* that stuck like burrs in August Turnbull's memory, furnishing him with labels, backing, for many of his personally evolved convictions and experience.

They were soon descending the steps to the anteroom of the café, where the men left their hats and sticks. As they entered

the brilliantly lighted space beyond a captain hurried forward. "Good evening, gentlemen," he said servilely; "Mr. Turnbull — "

He ushered them to a table by the rope of an open floor for dancing and removed a reserved card. There he stood attentively with a waiter at his shoulder.

"What will you have?" Frederick Rathe asked generally. "For me nothing but beer. Not the filthy American stuff." He turned to the servants. "If you still have some of the other. You understand?"

"No beer for me!" Louise exclaimed.

"Champagne," the captain suggested.

She agreed, but Caroline had a fancy for something else. August Turnbull preferred a Scotch whisky and soda. The café was crowded; everywhere drinking multiplied in an illuminated haze of cigarettes. A slight girl in an airy slip and bare legs was executing a furious dance with a powdered youth on the open space. The girl whirled about her partner's head, a rigid shape in a flutter of white.

They stood limply answering the rattle of applause that followed. A woman in an extravagantly low-cut gown took their place, singing. There was no possibility of mistaking her allusions; August smiled broadly, but Louise and Caroline Rathe watched her with an unmoved sharp curiosity. In the same manner they studied other women in the café; more than once August Turnbull hastily averted his gaze at the discovery that his daughter and he were intent upon the same individual.

"The U-boats are at it again," Bernard commented in a lowered voice.

"And, though it is war," Frederick added, "every one here is squealing like a mouse. 'Ye are not great enough to know

of hatred and envy,' ” he quoted. “ ‘It is the good war which halloweth every cause.’ ”

“I wish you wouldn't say those things here,” his wife murmured.

“ ‘Thou goest to women?’ ” he lectured her with mock solemnity. “ ‘Do not forget thy whip!’ ”

The whisky ran in a burning tide through August Turnbull's senses. His surroundings became a little blurred, out of focus; his voice sounded unfamiliar, as though it came from somewhere behind him. Fresh buckets of wine were brought, fresh polished glasses. His appetite revived, and he ordered caviar. Beyond, a girl in a snakelike dress was breaking a scarlet boiled lobster with a nut cracker; her cigarette smoked on the table edge. Waiters passed bearing trays of steaming food, pitchers of foaming beer, colorless drinks with bobbing sliced limes, purplish sloe gin and sirupy cordials. Bernard's face was dark and there was a splash of champagne on his dinner shirt. Louise was uncertainly humming a fragment of popular song. The table was littered with empty plates and glasses. Perversely it made August think of Emmy, his wife, and acute dread touched him at the mockery of her wasting despair.

### III

The following morning, Thursday, August Turnbull was forced to go into the city. He drove to the Turnbull Bakery in a taxi and dispatched his responsibilities in time for luncheon uptown and an early afternoon train to the shore. The bakery was a consequential rectangle of brick, with the office across the front and a court resounding with the shattering din of ponderous delivery trucks. All the vehicles, August saw, bore a new temporary label advertising still another war bread; there was, too, a subsidiary patriotic declaration: “Win the War With Wheat.”



He was, as always, fascinated by the mammoth trays of bread, the enormous flood of substance produced as the result of his energy and ability. Each loaf was shut in a sanitary paper envelope; the popular superstition, sanitation, had contributed as much as anything to his marked success. He liked to picture himself as a great force, a granary on which the city depended for life; it pleased him to think of thousands of people, men, women, and children, waiting for his loaves or perhaps suffering through the inability to buy them.

August left a direction for a barrel of superlative flour to be sent to his cottage, and then with a curious feeling of expectancy he departed. He was unable to grasp the cause of his sudden impatience to be again at the sea. On the train, in the Pullman smoking compartment, his coat swinging on a hook beside him, the vague haste centered surprisingly about the person of Miss Beggs. At first he was annoyed by the reality and persistence of her image; then he slipped into an unquestioning consideration of her.

Never had he seen a more healthy being, and that alone, he told himself, was sufficient to account for his interest. He liked marked physical well-being; particularly, he added, in women. A sick wife, for example, was the most futile thing imaginable; a wife should exist for the comfort and pleasure of her husband. What little Miss Beggs — her name, he now remembered from the checks made out for her, was Meta Beggs — had said was as vigorous as herself. He realized that she had a strong, even rebellious personality. That, in her, however, should not be encouraged — an engaging submission was the becoming attitude for her sex.

He proceeded immediately into the ocean, puffing strenuously and gazing about. No women could be seen. They never had any regularity of habit, he complained silently. After dinner — a

surfeit of tenderloin Bordelaise — he walked up the short incline to the boardwalk, where on one of the benches overlooking the sparkling water he saw a slight familiar figure. It was Miss Beggs. Her eyes dwelt on him momentarily and then returned to the horizon.

“You are a great deal alone,” he commented on the far end of the bench.

“It’s because I choose to be,” she answered sharply.

An expression of displeasure was audible in his reply, “You should have no trouble.”

“I ought to explain,” she continued, her slim hands clasped on shapely knees; “I mean that I can’t get what I want.”

“So you prefer nothing?”

She nodded.

“That’s different,” August Turnbull declared. “Anybody could see you’re particular. Still, it’s strange you haven’t met — well, one that suited you.”

“What good would it do me — a school-teacher, and now a companion!”

“You might be admired for those very things.”

“Yes, by old ladies, male and female. Not men. There’s just one attraction for them.”

“Well —”

She turned now and faced him with a suppressed bitter energy. “Clothes,” she said.

“That’s nonsense!” he replied emphatically. “Dress is only incidental.”

“When did you first notice me?” she demanded. “In bathing. That bathing suit cost more than any two of my dresses. It is absolutely right.” August was confused by the keenness of her perception. It wasn’t proper for a woman to understand such facts. He was at a loss for a reply. “Seven men spoke to me in

it one afternoon. It is no good for you to try to reassure me with platitudes; I know better. I ought to, at least."

August Turnbull was startled by the fire of resentment smoldering under her still pale exterior. Why, she was like a charged battery. If he touched her, he thought, sparks would fly. She was utterly different from Emmy, as different as a live flame from ashes.

It was evident that having at last spoken she intended to unburden herself of long-accumulated passionate words.

"All my life I've had to listen to and smile sweetly at ridiculous hypocrisies. I have had to teach them and live them too. But now I'm so sick of them I can't keep it up a month longer. I could kill some one, easily. In a world where salvation for a woman is in a pair of slippers I have to be damned. If I could have kept my hair smartly done up and worn sheer batiste do you suppose for a minute I'd be a companion to Mrs. Turnbull? I could be going out to the cafés in a landaulet."

"And looking a lot better than most that do," he commented without premeditation

She glanced at him again, and he saw that her eyes were gray, habitually half closed and inviting.

"I've had frightfully bad luck," she went on; "once or twice when it seemed that I was to have a chance, when it appeared brighter — everything went to pieces."

"Perhaps you want too much," he suggested.

"Perhaps," she agreed wearily; "ease and pretty clothes and — a man." She added the latter with a more musical inflection than he had yet heard.

"Of course," he proceeded importantly, "there are not a great many men. At least I haven't found them. As you say, most people are incapable of any power of decision. I always maintain it's something in the country. Now in —" He stopped, re-

began: "In Europe they are different. There a man is better understood, and women as well."

"I have never been out of America," Miss Beggs admitted.

"But you might well have been," he assured her; "you are more continental than any one else I can think of."

He moved toward the middle of the bench and she said quickly: "You must not misunderstand. I am not cheap nor silly. It might have been better for me." She addressed the fading light on the sea. "Silly women, too, do remarkably well. But I am not young enough to change now." She rose, gracefully drawn against space; her firm chin was elevated and her hands clenched. "I won't grow old this way and shrivel like an apple," she half cried.

It would be a pity, he told himself, watching her erect figure diminish over the boardwalk. He had a feeling of having come in contact with an extraordinarily potent force. By heaven, she positively crackled! He smiled, thinking of the misguided people who had employed her, ignorant of all that underlay that severe prudent manner. At the same time he was flattered that she had confided in him. It was clear she recognized that he, at least, was a man. He was really sorry for her — what an invigorating influence she was!

She had spoken of being no longer young — something over thirty-five he judged — and that brought the realization that he was getting on. A few years now, ten or twelve, and life would be behind him. It was a rare and uncomfortable thought. Usually he saw himself as at the most desirable age — a young spirit tempered by wisdom and experience. But in a flash he read that his prime must depart; every hour left was priceless.

The best part of this must be dedicated to a helpless invalid; a strong current of self-pity set through him. But it was speedily lost in a more customary arrogance. August Turnbull repeated

the favorite aphorisms from Frederick Rathe about the higher man. If he believed them at all, if they applied to life in general they were equally true in connection with his home; in short — his wife. Emmy Turnbull couldn't really be called a wife. There should be a provision to release men from such bonds.

It might be that the will-to-power would release itself. In theory that was well enough, but practically there were countless small difficulties. The strands of life were so tied in, one with another. Opinion was made up of an infinite number of stupid prejudices. In short, no way presented itself of getting rid of Emmy.

His mind returned to Meta Beggs. What a woman she was! What a triumph to master her contemptuous stubborn being!

#### IV

At least, August reflected with a degree of comfort at breakfast, Emmy didn't come down in the morning; she hadn't enough strength. He addressed himself to the demolishment of a ripe Cassaba melon. It melted in his mouth to the consistency of sugary water. His coffee cup had a large flattened bowl, and pouring in the ropy cream with his free hand he lifted the silver cover of a dish set before him. It held spitted chicken livers and bacon and gave out an irresistible odor. There were, too, potatoes chopped fine with peppers and browned; and hot delicately sweetened buns. He emptied two full spits, renewed his coffee and finished the potatoes.

With a butter ball at the center of a bun he casually glanced at the day's paper. The submarines, he saw, were operating farther south. A small passenger steamer, the *Veronica*, had been torpedoed outside the Delaware Capes.

A step sounded in the hall, and Louise entered the dining room.



clad all in white with the exception of a closely fitting yellow hat. After a moment Victorine, a girl small for her age, with a petulant satiated expression, followed.

"It's a shame," Louise observed, "that with Morice and his wife in the cottage you have to breakfast alone. I suppose all those theatrical people get up at noon."

"Not quite," Rosalie told her from the doorway.

Louise made no reply other than elevating her brows. Victorine looked at the other with an exact mirroring of her mother's disdain.

"Good morning," Morice said indistinctly, hooking the collar of his uniform. "It's a bloody nuisance," he asserted. "Why can't they copy the English jacket?"

"It is much better looking," Louise added.

"Well," Rosalie proclaimed, "I'm glad to see Morice in any; even if it means nothing more than a desk in the Quartermaster's Department."

"That is very necessary," August Turnbull spoke decidedly.

"Perhaps," she agreed.

"I think it is bad taste to raise such insinuations." Louise was severe.

"An army," August put in, "travels on its stomach. As Louise suggests — we must ask you not to discuss the question in your present tone." Morice's wife half-audibly spoke into her melon, and his face reddened. "What did I understand you to say?" he demanded.

"Oh, 'Swat the fly!' " Rosalie answered hardily.

"Not at all!" he almost shouted. "What you said was 'Swat the Kaiser!'"

"Well, swat him!"

"It was evident, also, that you did not refer to the Emperor of Germany — but to me."

"You said it," she admitted vulgarly. "If any house ever had a Hohenzollern this has."

"Shut up, Rosalie!" her husband commanded, perturbed; "you'll spoil everything."

"It might be better if she continued," Louise Foster corrected him. "Perhaps then we'd learn something of this — this beauty."

"I got good money for my face anyhow," Rosalie asserted. "And no cash premium went with it either. As for going on, I'll go." She turned to August Turnbull: "I've been stalling round here for nearly a year with Morice scared to death trying to get a piece of change out of you. Now I'm through; I've worked hard for a season's pay, but this is slavery. What you want is an amalgamated lady bootblack and nautch dancer. You're a joke to a free white woman. I'm sorry for your wife. She ought to slip you a bichloride tablet. If it was worth while I'd turn you over to the authorities for breaking the food regulations."

She rose, unceremoniously shoving back her chair. "For a fact, I'm tired of watching you eat. You down as much as a company of good boys on the march. Don't get black in the face; I'd be afraid to if I were you."

August Turnbull's rage beat like a hammer at the base of his head. He, too, rose, leaning forward with his napkin crumpled in a pounding fist.

"Get out of my house!" he shouted.

"That's all right enough," she replied; "the question is — is Morice coming with me? Is that khaki he has on or a Kate Greenaway suit?"

Morice looked from one to the other in obvious dismay. He had a pleasant dull face and a minute spiked mustache on an irresolute mouth.

"If you stay with me," she warned him further, "I'll have you out of that grocery store and into a trench."

"Pleasant for you, Morice," Louise explained.

"Things were so comfortable, Rosalie," he protested despairingly. "What in the name of sense made you stir this all up? The governor won't do a tap for us now."

His wife stood by herself, facing the inimical Turnbull front, while Morice wavered between.

"If you'll get along," the former told him, "I can make a living till you come back. We can do without any Trübner money. I'm not a lot at German, but I guess you can understand me," she again addressed August. "Not that I blame you for the change, such as it is."

"I'll have to go with her," Morice unhappily declared.

August Turnbull's face was stiff with congestion. The figures before him wavered in a sort of fog. He put out a hand, supporting himself on the back of his chair.

"Get out of my house," he repeated in a hoarse whisper.

Fortunately Morice's leave had come to an end, and Rosalie and he withdrew in at least the semblance of a normal departure. August's rage changed to an indignant surprise, and he established himself with a rigid dignity on the veranda. There, happening on a cigar that burned badly, he was reduced to a state of further self-commiseration. That is, he dwelt on the general deterioration of the world about him. There was no discipline; there was no respect; authority was laughed at. All this was the result of laxness, of the sentimentality he condemned; a firmer hand was needed everywhere.

He turned with relief to the contemplation of Meta Beggs; she was enormously satisfactory to consider. August watched her now with the greatest interest; he even sat in his wife's room while her companion moved silently and gracefully about. Miss Beggs couldn't have noticed this, for scarcely ever did her gaze meet his; she had a habit of standing lost in thought, her slimness a little

drooping, as if she were weary or depressed. She was in his mind continually — Miss Beggs and Emmy, his wife.

The latter had a surprising power to disturb him; lately he had even dreamed of her starving to death in the presence of abundant food. He began to be superstitious about it, to think of her in a ridiculous nervous manner as an evil design on his peace and security. She seemed unnatural with her shrunken face bowed opposite him at the table. His feeling for her shifted subconsciously to hatred. It broke out publicly in sardonic or angry periods under which she would shrink away, incredibly timid, from his scorn. This quality of utter helplessness gave the menace he divined in her its illusive air of unreality. She seemed — she was — entirely helpless; a prematurely aged woman, of the mildest instincts, dying of malnutrition.

Miss Beggs now merged into all his daily life, his very fiber. He regarded her in an attitude of admirable frankness. "Still it is extraordinary you haven't married."

The tide was out, it was late afternoon, and they were walking over the hard exposed sand. Whenever she came on a shell she crushed it with a sharp heel.

"There were some," she replied indifferently.

He nodded gravely. "It would have to be a special kind of man," he agreed. "An ordinary individual would be crushed by your personality. You'd need a firm hand."

Her face was inscrutable. "I have always had the misfortune to be too late," she told him.

"I wish I had known you sooner!" he exclaimed.

Her arms, in transparent sleeves, were like marble. His words crystallized an overwhelming realization of how exactly she was suited to him. The desire to shut her will in his hand increased a thousandfold.

"Yes," she said, "I would have married you. But there's

no good discussing it." She breathed deeply with a sinking forward of her rounded shoulders. All her vigor seemed to have left her. "I have been worried about Mrs. Turnbull lately," she went on. "Perhaps it's my imagination — does she look weaker to you?"

"I haven't noticed," he answered brusquely.

Curiously he had never thought of Emmy as dying; she appeared eternal, without the possibility of offering him the relief of such freedom as yet remained. Freedom for — for Meta Beggs.

"The doctor was at the cottage again Thursday," she informed him. "I didn't hear what he said."

"Humbugs," August Turnbull pronounced.

A sudden caution invaded him. It would be well not to implicate himself too far with his wife's companion. She was a far shrewder woman than was common; there was such a thing as blackmail. He studied her privately. Damn it, what a pen he had been caught in! Her manner, too, changed immediately, as though she had read his feeling.

"I shall have to go back."

She spoke coldly. A moment before she had been close beside him, but now she might as well have been miles away.

## V

The fuse of the electric light in the dining room burned out, and dinner proceeded with only the illumination of the silk-hooded candles. In the subdued glow Meta Beggs was infinitely attractive. His wife's place was empty. Miss Beggs had brought apologetic word from Emmy that she felt too weak to leave her room. A greater degree of comfort possessed August Turnbull than he had experienced for months. With no one at the table but the slim woman on the left and



himself a positive geniality radiated from him. He pressed her to have more champagne — he had ordered that since she preferred it to Rhine wine — urged more duckling, and ordered the butler to leave the brandy decanter before them.

She laughed — a rare occurrence — and imitated, for his intense amusement, Mrs. Frederick Rathe's extreme cutting social manner. He drank more than he intended, and when he rose his legs were insecure. He made his way toward Meta Beggs. She stood motionless, her thin lips like a thread of blood on her tense face.

"What a wife you'd make!" he muttered.

There was a discreet cough at his back, and swinging about he saw a maid in a white starched cap and high cuffs.

"Excuse me, sir," she said; "Mrs. Turnbull wants to know would you please come up to her room."

He swayed slightly, glowering at her with a hot face in which a vein throbbed persistently at his temple. Miss Beggs had disappeared.

"Very well," he agreed heavily.

Mounting the stairs he fumbled for his cigar case, and entered the chamber beyond his, clipping the end from a superlative perfecto.

Emmy was in bed, propped up on a bank of embroidered pillows. A light from one side threw the shadow of her head on a wall in an animated caricature of life.

"I didn't want to disturb you, August."

Her voice was weak and apologetic. He stood irritably beside her.

"It's hot in here." His wife at once detected whatever assaulted his complete comfort. She fell into a silence that strained his patience to the utmost.

When at last she spoke it was in a tone of voice he had never

heard from her — impersonal, with at the same time a note of fear like the flutter of a bird's wing.

"The doctor has been here two or three times lately. I didn't want to bother you, and he said — "

She broke off, and her hand raised from her side in a gesture of seeking. He held it uncomfortably, wishing that the occasion would speedily end.

"August, I've — I've got to leave you."

He did not comprehend her meaning, and stood stupidly looking down at her spent face. "I'm going to die, August, almost any time now. I wanted to tell you first when we were quietly together; and then Louise and Bernard must know."

His sensations were so confused, the mere shock of such an announcement had so confounded him that he was unable to penetrate the meaning of the sudden expansion of his blood. His attention strayed from the actuality of his wife to the immaterial shadow wavering on the wall. There Emmy's profile, grotesquely enlarged and sharpened, grimaced at him. August Turnbull's feelings disentangled and grew clearer, there was a conventional memory of his wife as a young woman, the infinitely sharper realization that soon he must be free, a vision of Meta Beggs as she had been at dinner that night, and intense relief from nameless strain.

He moved through the atmosphere of suspense that followed the knowledge of Emmy's condition with a feeling of being entirely apart from his family. Out of the chaos of his emotions the sense of release was most insistent. Naturally he couldn't share it with any one else, not at present. He avoided thinking directly of Meta Beggs, partly from the shreds of the superstitious dread that had once colored his attitude toward his wife and partly from the necessity to control what otherwise would sweep him into a resistless torrent. However, most of

his impatience had vanished — a little while now, and in a discreet manner he could grasp all that he had believed so hopelessly removed.

Except for the occasions of Louise's informal presence he dined alone with Miss Beggs. They were largely silent, attacking their plates with complete satisfaction. On the day of her monthly payment he drew the check for a thousand dollars in place of the stipulated hundred, and gave it to her without comment. She nodded, managing to convey entire understanding and acceptance of what it forecast. Once, at the table, he called her Meta.

She deliberated a reply — he had asked her opinion about British bottled sauces — but when she answered she called him Mr. Turnbull. This, too, pleased him. She had an unerring judgment in the small affairs of deference. Dinner had been better than usual, and he realized he had eaten too much. His throat felt constricted, he had difficulty in swallowing a final gulp of coffee; the heavy odors of the dining room almost sickened him.

"We'll get out on the beach," he said abruptly; "a little air."

They proceeded past the unremitting sprinklers on the strip of lawn to the wide gray sweep of sand. At that hour no one else was visible, and a new recklessness invaded his discomfort. "You see," he told her, "that bad luck of yours isn't going to hold."

"It seems incredible," she murmured. She added without an appearance of the least ulterior thought: "Mrs. August Turnbull."

"Exactly," he asserted.

A triumphant conviction of pleasure to come surged through him like a subtle exhilarating cordial.

"I'll take no nonsensical airs from Louise or the Rathes," he proclaimed.

"Don't let that worry you," she answered serenely.

He saw that it need not, and looked forward appreciatively to a scene in which Meta would not come off second.

Above them the long curve of the boardwalk was empty, with, behind it, the suave ornamental roofs of the cottages. A wind quartering from the shore had smoothed the ocean into the semblance of a limitless and placid lake. Minute waves ruffled along the beach with a continuous whispering, and the vault of the west, from which the sun had just withdrawn, was filled with light the color of sauterne wine.

It was inconceivable to August Turnbull that soon Emmy would be gone out of his life. He shook his thick shoulders as if by a gesture to unburden himself of her unpleasant responsibility. He smiled slightly at the memory of how he had come to fear her. It had been the result of the strain he was under; once more the vision of mountainous bread and Emmy returned. The devil was in the woman!

"What are you smiling at?" Meta asked.

"Perhaps it was because my luck, as well, has changed," he admitted.

She came close to him, quivering with emotion.

"I want everything!" she cried in a vibrant hunger; "everything! Do you understand? Are you willing? I'm starved as much as that woman up in her bed. Can you give me all the gayety, all the silks and emeralds there are in the world?"

He patted her shoulder. "You'll look like a Christmas tree. When this damned war is over we will go to Europe, to Berlin and Munich. They have the finest streets and theaters and cafés in the world. There things are run by men for men. The

food is the best of all — no French fripperies, but solid rare cuts. Drinking is an art — ”

“What is that out in the water?” she idly demanded.

He gazed impatiently over the unscored tide and saw a dark infinitesimal blot.

“I have been watching it for a long while,” she continued.

“It’s coming closer, I think.”

He again took up his planning.

“We’ll stay two or three years; till things get on their feet here. Turn the bakery into a company. No work, nothing but parties.”

“Do look!” she repeated. “It’s coming in — a little boat. I suppose it is empty.”

The blot was now near enough for him to distinguish its outline. As Meta said, no one was visible. It was drifting. Against his wish his gaze fastened on the approaching boat. It hesitated, appeared to swing away, and then resumed the progress inshore.

“I believe it will float into that cut in the beach below,” he told her.

His attention was divided between the craft and the image of all the pleasures he would introduce to Meta — Turnbull. It was a lucky circumstance that he had plenty of money, for he realized that she would not marry a poor man. This was not only natural but commendable. Poor men were fools, too weak for success; only the strong ate white bread and had fine women, only the masterful conquered circumstance.

“Come,” she said, catching his hand; “it’s almost here.”

She half pulled him over the glistening wet sand to where the deeper water thrust into the beach. Her interest was now fully communicated to him.

“We must drag it safely up,” he articulated, out of breath



from her eagerness. The bow swept into the onward current, it moved more swiftly, and then sluggishly settled against the bottom. Painted on its blistering white side was a name, "*Veronica*," and "Ten persons." There was a slight movement at the rail, and a sharp unreasoning horror gripped August Turnbull.

"Something in it," he muttered. He wanted to turn away, to run from the beach; but a stronger curiosity dragged him forward. Not conscious of stepping through shallow water he advanced.

A hunger-ravished dead face was turned to him from the bottom, a huddle of bony joints, dried hands. There were others — all dead, starved. In a red glimmer he saw the incredible travesty of a child, a lead-colored woman shriveled and ageless from agony.

He fell back with a choking cry, "Emmy!"

There was a dull uproar in his head, and then a violent shock at the back of his brain. August Turnbull's body slid down into the tranquil ripples that ran along the boat's side.

## THE GOOD PROVIDER <sup>1</sup>

By FANNIE HURST

LIKE a suckling to the warmth of the mother, the township of Newton nestled pat against the flank of the city and drew from her through the arteries of electric trains and inter-urbans, elevated roads and motor-cars.

Such clots coagulate around the city in the form of Fern- dales and Glencoves, Yorkvilles and Newtons, and from them have sprung full-grown the joke paper and the electric lawn-mower, the five-hundred-dollars-down bungalow, and the flower-seed catalogue.

The instinct to return to nature lies deep in men like music that slumbers in harp-strings, but the return to nature *via* the five-forty-six accommodation is fraught with chance.

Nature cannot abide the haunts of men; she faints upon the asphalt bosom of the city. But to abide in the haunts of nature men's hearts bleed. Behind that asphaltic bosom and behind faces too tired to smile, hearts bud and leafen when millinery and open street-cars announce the spring. Behind that asphaltic bosom the murmur of the brook is like an insidious stream, and when for a moment it gushes to the surface men pay the five hundred dollars down and inclose return postage for the flower-seed catalogue.

The commuter lives with his head in the rarefied atmosphere of his thirty-fifth-story office, his heart in the five-hundred-dollars-down plot of improved soil, and one eye on the timetable.

<sup>1</sup> From *Just Around the Corner*, by Fannie Hurst. Copyright, 1914, by Harper & Brothers. Reprinted by special permission.

For longer than its most unprogressive dared hope, the township of Newton lay comfortable enough without the pale, until one year the interurban reached out steel arms and scooped her to the bosom of the city.

Overnight, as it were, the inoculation was complete. Bungalows and one-story, vine-grown real-estate offices sprang up on large, light-brown tracts of improved property, traffic sold by the book. The new Banner Store, stirred by the heavy, three-trolley interurban cars and the new proximity of the city, swung a three-color electric sign across the sidewalk and instituted a trading-stamp system. But in spite of the three-color sign and double the advertising space in the *Newton Weekly Gazette*, Julius Binswanger felt the suction of the city drawing at his strength, and at the close of the second summer he took invoice and frowned at what he saw.

The frown remained an indelible furrow between his eyes. Mrs. Binswanger observed it across the family table one Saturday, and paused in the epic rite of ladling soup out of a tureen, a slight pucker on her large, soft-fleshed face.

"Honest, Julius, when you come home from the store nights right away I get the blues."

Mr. Binswanger glanced up from his soup and regarded his wife above the bulging bib of his napkin. Late sunshine percolated into the dining-room through a vine that clambered up the screen door and flecked a design like coarse lace across his inquiring features.

"Right away you get what, Becky?"

"Right away I get the blues. A long face you've had for so long I can't remember."

"Ya, ya, Becky, something you got to have to talk about. A long face she puts on me yet, children."

"Ain't I right, Poil; ain't I, Izzy? Ask your own children!"

Mr. Isadore Binswanger shrugged his custom-made shoulders until the padding bulged like the muscles of a heavy-weight champion, and tossed backward the mane of his black pompadour.

"Ma, I keep my mouth closed. Every time I open it I put my foot in it."

Mr. Binswanger waggled a rheumatic forefinger.

"A dude like you with a red-and-white shirt like I wouldn't keep in stock ain't —"

"See, ma, you started something."

"Sh-h-h! Julius! For your own children I'm ashamed. Once a week Izzy comes out to supper, and like a funeral it is. For your own children to be afraid to open their mouths ain't nothing to be proud of. Right now your own daughter is afraid to begin to tell you something — something what's happened. Ain't it, Poil?"

Miss Pearl Binswanger tugged a dainty bite out of a slice of bread, and showed the oval of her teeth against the clear, gold-olive of her skin. The same scarf of sunshine fell like a Spanish shawl across her shoulders, and lay warm on her little bosom and across her head, which was small and dark as *Giaconda's*.

"I ain't saying nothing, am I, mamma? The minute I try to talk to papa about — about moving to the city or anything, he gets excited like the store was on fire."

"Ya, ya, more as that I get excited over such nonsenses."

"No, to your papa you children say nothing. It's me that gets my head dinned full. Your children, Julius, think that for me you do anything what I ask; but I don't see it. Pass your papa the dumplings, Poil. Can I help it that he carries on him a face like a funeral?"

"Na, na, Becky; for why should I have a long face? Tomorrow I buy me a false face like on Valentine's Day, and then you don't have to look at me no more."

"See! Right away mad he gets with me. Izzy, them noodles I made only on your account; in the city you don't get 'em like that, huh? Some more *Kartoffel Salad*, Julius?"

"Ya, but not so much! My face don't suit my wife and children yet, that's the latest."

"Three times a day all week, Izzy, I ask your papa if he don't feel right. 'Yes,' he says, always 'yes.' Like I says to Poil, what's got him since he's in the new store I don't know."

"*Ach*, you — the whole three of you make me sick! What you want me to do, walk the tight rope to show what a good humor I got?"

"No; we want, Julius, that you should come home every night with a long face on you till for the neighbors I'm ashamed."

"A little more *Kartoffel Salad*, Becky? Not so much!"

"Like they don't talk enough about us already. With a young lady in the house we live out here where the dogs won't bark at us."

"I only wish all girls had just so good a home as Pearlle."

"Aw, papa, that ain't no argument! I'd rather live in a coop in the city, where a girl can have some life, than in a palace out in this hole."

"Hole, she calls a room like this! A dining-room set she sits on what her grandfather made with his own hands out of the finest cherry wood —"

"For a young girl can you blame her? She feels like if she lived in the city she would meet people and Izzy's friends. Talk for yourself, Poil."

"I —"

"Boys like Ignatz Landauer and Max Teitlebaum, what he meets at the Young Men's Association. Talk for yourself, Poil."

"I —"



"Poil's got a tenant for the house, Julius. I ain't afraid to tell you."

"I don't listen to such nonsense."

"From the real-estate offices they sent 'em, Julius, and Poil took 'em through. Furnished off our hands they take it for three months, till their bungalow is done for 'em. Forty dollars for a house like ours on the wrong side of town away from the improvements ain't so bad. A grand young couple, no children. Izzy thinks it's a grand idea, too, Julius. He says if we move to the city he don't have to live in such a dark little hall-room no more. To the hotel he can come with us on family rates just so cheap. Ain't it, Izzy?"

Mr. Isadore Binswanger broke his conspiracy of silence gently, like a skeptic at breakfast taps his candle-blown egg with the tip of a silver spoon once, twice, thrice, then opens it slowly, suspiciously.

"I said, pa, that with forty dollars a month rent from the house, and —"

"In my own house, where I belong and can afford, I stay. I'm an old man, and —"

"Not so fast, pa, not so fast! I only said that with forty dollars from the house for three months this winter you can live almost as cheap in the city as here. And for me to come out every Saturday night to take Pearlle to the theater ain't such a cinch, neither. Take a boy like Max Teitlebaum, he likes her well enough to take her to the theater hisself, but by the time he gets out here for her he ain't got no enjoyment left in him."

"When a young man likes well enough a young lady, a forty-five minutes' street-car ride is like nothing."

"Aw, papa, in story-books such talk is all right, but when a young man has got to change cars at Low Bridge and wait for the Owl going home it don't work out so easy — does it Izzy, does it, mamma?"

"For three years, pa, even before I got my first job in the city, always mamma and Pearlle been wantin' a few months away."

"With my son in the city losing every two months his job I got enough city to last me so long as I live. When in my store I need so bad a good young man for the new-fashioned advertising and stock, to the city he has to go for a salesman's job. When a young man can't get along in business with his old father I don't go running a ter him in the city."

"Pa, for heaven's sakes don't begin that! I'm sick of listening to it. Newton ain't no place for a fellow to waste his time in."

"What else you do in the city, I like to know!"

"Julius, leave Izzy alone when one night a week he comes home."

"For my part you don't need to move to the city. I only said to Pearlle and ma, when they asked me, that a few months in a family hotel like the Wellington can't bust you. For me to come out home every Saturday night to take Pearlle into the theater ain't no cinch. In town there's plenty of grand boys that I know who live at the Wellington — Ignatz Landauer, Max Teitlebaum, and all that crowd. Yourself I've heard you say how much you like Max."

"For why, when everybody is moving out to Newton, we move away?"

"That's just it, papa, now with the interurban boom you got the chance to sublet. Ain't it, mamma and Izzy?"

"Sure it —"

"Ya, ya; I know just what's coming, but for me Newton is good enough."

"What about your children, Julius? You ain't the only one in the family."

"Twenty-five years I've lived in this one place since the store

was only so big as this room, and on this house we didn't have a second story. A home that I did everything but build with my own hands I don't move out of so easy. Such ideas you let your children pump you with, Becky."

"See, children, you say he can't never refuse me nothing; listen how he won't let me get in a word crossways before he snaps me off. If we sublet, Julius, we —"

"Sublet we don't neither! I should ride forty-five minutes into the city after my hard day's work, when away from the city forty-five minutes every one else is riding. My house is my house, my yard is my yard. I don't got no ideas like my high-toned son and daughter for a hotel where to stretch your feet you got to pay for the space."

"Listen to your papa, children, even before I got my mouth open good how he talks back to a wife that nursed him through ten years of bronchitis. All he thinks I'm good enough for is to make poultices and rub on his chest goose grease."

"*Ach*, Becky, don't fuss so with your old man. Look, even the cat you got scared. Here, Billy — here, kitty, kitty."

"Ain't I asked you often enough, Julius, not to feed on the carpet a piece of meat to the cat? 'Sh-h-h-h, Billy, scat! All that I'm good enough for is to clean up. How he talks to his wife yet!"

Miss Binswanger caught her breath on the crest of a sob and pushed her untouched plate toward the center of the table; tears swam on a heavy film across her eyes and thickened her gaze and voice.

"This — ain't — no — hole for — for a girl to live in."

"All I wish is you should never live in a worse."

"I ain't got nothin' here, papa, but sit and sit and sit on the porch every night with you and mamma. When Izzy comes out once a week to take me to a show, how he fusses and fusses you

hear for yourselves. For a girl nearly — twenty — it ain't no joke."

"It ain't, papa; it ain't no joke for me to have to take her in and out every week, lemme tell you."

"Eat your supper, Poil; not eating don't get you nowheres with your papa."

"I — I don't want nothin'."

A tear wiggle-waggled down Miss Binswanger's smooth cheek, and she fumbled at her waist-line for her handkerchief.

"I—I—I just wish sometimes I — was dead."

Mr. Binswanger shot his bald head outward suddenly, as a turtle darts forward from its case, and rapped the table noisily with his fist clutched around an upright fork, and his voice climbing to a falsetto.

"I — I wish in my life I had never heard the name of the city."

"Now, Julius, don't begin."

"Ruination it has brought me. My boy won't stay by me in the store so he can't gallivant in the city; my goil won't talk to me no more for madness because we ain't in the city; my wife eats out of me my heart because we ain't in the city. For supper every night when I come home tired from the store all I get served to me is the city. I can't swallow no more! Money you all think I got what grows on trees, just because I give all what I got. You should know how tight — how tight I got to squeeze for it."

Mrs. Binswanger threw her arms apart in a wide gesture of helplessness.

"See, children, just as soon as I say a word, mad like a wet hen he gets and right away puts on a poor mouth."

"Mad yet I shouldn't get with such nonsense. Too good they both got it. Always I told you how we spoilt 'em."

"Don't holler so, pa."

"Don't tell me what to do! You with your pretty man's suit and your hair and finger-nails polished like a shoe-shine. You go to the city, and I stay home where I belong in my own house."

"His house — always his house!"

"Ya, a eight-room house and running water she's got if she wants to have company. Your mamma didn't have no eight rooms and finished attic when she was your age. In back of a feed store she sat me. Too good you got it, I say. New hardwood floors down-stairs didn't I have to put in, and electric light on the porch so your company don't break his neck? Always something new, and now no more I can't eat a meal in peace."

"'Sh-h-h-h, Julius!"

"I should worry that the Teitlebaums and the Landauers live in a fine family hotel in Seventy-second Street. Such people with big stores in Sixth Avenue can buy and sell us. Not even if I could afford it would I want to give up my house and my porch, where I can smoke my pipe, and my comforts that I worked for all my life, and move to the city in rooms so little and so far up I can't afford to pay for 'em. I should give up my chickens and my comforts!"

"Your comforts, always your comforts! Do I think of *my* comforts?"

"Ma, don't you and pa begin now with your fussing. Like cats you are one minute and the next like doves."

"Don't boss me in my own house, Izzy! So afraid your papa is that he won't get all the comforts what's coming to him. I wish you was so good to me as you are to that cat, Julius — twice I asked you not to feed him on the carpet. Scat, Billy!"

"Pass me some noodles, maw."

"Good ones, eh, Izzy?"

"Fine, maw."



"I ask you, is it more comfortable, Julius, for me to be cooped up in the city in rooms that all together ain't as big as my kitchen? No, but of my children I think too besides my own comforts."

"Ya, ya; now, Becky, don't get excited. Look at your mamma, Pearl; shame on her, eh? How mad she gets at me till blue like her wrapper her face gets."

"My house and my yard so smooth like your hand, and my big porch and my new laundry with patent wringer is more to me as a hotel in the city. But when I got a young lady daughter with no attentions and no prospects I can't think always of my own comforts."

"Ya, ya, Becky; don't get excited."

"Don't ya-ya me, neither."

"*Ach*, old lady, that only means how much I love you."

"We got a young lady daughter; do you want that she should sit and sit and sit till for ever we got a daughter, only she ain't young no more. I tell you out here ain't no place for a young goil — what has she got?"

"Yes, papa; what have I got? The trees for company!"

"Do you see, Julius, in the new bungalows any families moving in with young ladies? Would even your son Isadore what ain't a young lady stay out here when he was old enough to get hisself a job in the city?"

"That a boy should leave his old father like that!"

"Wasn't you always kickin' to me, pa, that there wasn't a future in the business after the transaction came — wasn't you?"

"No more arguments you get with me!"

"What chance, Julius, I ask you, has a goil like Poil got out here in Newton? To sit on the front porch nights with Meena Schlossman don't get her nowheres; to go to the moving-pictures with Eddie Goldstone, what can't make salt for hisself, ain't

nothing for a goil that hopes to do well for herself. If she only looks out of the corner of her eye at Mike Donnely three fits right away you take!"

"*Gott*, that's what we need yet!"

"See, even when I mention it, look at him, Poil, how red he gets! But should she sit and sit?"

"*Ach*, such talk makes me sick. Plenty girls outside the city gets better husbands as in it. Na, na, mamma, did you find me in the city?"

"*Ach*, Julius, stop foolin'. When I got you for a husband enough trouble I found for myself."

"In my business like it goes down every day, Becky, I ain't got the right to make a move."

"See, the poor mouth again! Just so soon as we begin to talk about things. A man that can afford only last March to take out a new five-thousand-dollar life-insurance policy —"

"'Sh-h-h-h, Becky."

"For why shouldn't your children know it? Yes, up-stairs in my little green box along with my cameo ear-rings and gold watch-chain I got it put away, children. A new life-insurance policy on light-blue paper, with a red seal I put only last week. When a man that never had any insurance before takes it out so easy he can afford it."

"Not — not because I could afford it I took it, Becky, but with business low I squeeze myself a little to look ahead."

"Only since we got the new store you got so tight. Now you got more you don't let it go so easy. A two-story brick with plate-glass fronts now, and always a long face."

"A long face! You should be worried like I with big expenses and big stock and little business. Why you think I take out a policy so late at such a terrible premium? Why? So when I'm gone you got something beside debts!"

"Just such a poor mouth you had, Julius, when we wanted on the second story."

"I ask you, Becky: one thing that you and the children ever wanted ain't I found a way to get for you? I ask you?"

"Ya, but a woman that was always economical like me you didn't need to refuse. Never for myself I asked for things."

"*Ach*, ma and pa, don't begin that on the one night a week I'm home."

"So economical all my life I been. Till Izzy was ashamed to go to school in 'em I made him pants out of yours. You been a good husband, but I been just as good a wife, and don't you forget it!"

"Na, na, old lady; don't get excited again. But right here at my table, even while I hate you should have to know it, Becky, in front of your children I say it, I — I'm all mortgaged up, even on this house. I'm —"

"On the old store you was mortgaged, too. In a business a man has got to raise money on his assets. Didn't you always say that yourself? Business is business."

"But I ain't got the business no more, Becky. I — I ain't said nothing, but — but next week I close out the trimmed hats, Becky."

"Papa!"

"Trimmed hats! Julius, your finest department."

"For why I keep a department that don't pay its salt? I ain't like you three; looks ain't everything."

"I know. I know. Ten years ago the biggest year what we ever had you closed out the rubber coats, too, right in the middle of the season. A poor mouth you'd have, Julius, if right now you was eating gold dumplings instead of chicken dumplings."

"Na, na, Becky; don't pick on your old man."

"Since we been married I —"

"Aw, ma and pa, go hire a hall."

Suddenly Miss Binswanger clattered down her fork and pushed backward from the table; tears streamed toward the corners of her mouth.

"That's always the way! What's the use of getting off the track? All we want to say, papa, is we got a chance like we never had to sublet. Forty dollars a month, and no children. For three months we could live in the city on family rates, and maybe for three months I'd know I was alive. A — a girl's got feelings, papa! And, honest, it — it ain't no trip, papa — what's forty-five minutes on the car with your newspaper? — honest, papa, it ain't."

Mr. Isadore Binswanger drained a glass of water.

"Give 'er a chance, pa. The boys'll show her a swell time in the city — Max Teitlebaum and all that crowd. It ain't no fun for me traipsin' out after her, lemme tell you."

Mr. Binswanger pushed back his chair and rose from the table. His eyes, the wet-looking eyes of age and asthma, retreated behind a network of wrinkles as intricate as overhead wiring.

"I wish," he cried, "I was as far as the bottom of the ocean away from such nonsense as I find in my own family. Up to my neck I'm full. Like wolfs you are! On my neck I can feel your breath hot like a furnace. Like wolfs you drive me till I — I can't stand it no more. All what I ask is my peace — my little house, my little pipe, my little porch, and not even my peace can I have. You — you're a pack of wolfs, I tell you — even your fangs I can see, and — and I — wish I was so far away as the bottom of the ocean."

He shambled toward the door on legs bent to the cruel curve of rheumatism. The sun had dropped into a bursting west, and was as red as a mist of blood. Its reflection lay on the smooth lawn and hung in the dark shadows of quiet trees, and through

the fulvous haze of evening's first moment came the chirruping of crickets.

"I wish I was so far away as the bottom of the ocean."

The tight-sprung screen door sprang shut on his words, and his footsteps shambled across the wide ledge of porch. A silence fell across the little dining-table, and Miss Binswanger wiped at fresh tears, but her mother threw her a confident gesture of reassurance.

"Don't say no more now for a while, children."

Mr. Isadore Binswanger inserted a toothpick between his lips and stretched his limbs out at a hypotenuse from the chair.

"I'm done. I knew the old man would jump all over me."

"Izzy, you and Poil go on now; for the theater you won't catch the seven-ten car if you don't hurry. Leave it to me, Poil; I can tell by your papa's voice we got him won. How he fusses like just now don't make no difference; you know how your papa is. Here, Poil, lemme help you with your coat."

"I — I don't want to go, mamma!"

"*Ach*, now, Poil, you —"

"If you're coming with me you'd better get a hustle. I ain't going to hang around this grave-yard all evening."

Her brother rose to his slightly corpulent five feet five and shook his trousers into their careful creases. His face was a soft-fleshed rather careless replica of his mother's, with a dimple-cleft chin, and a delicate down of beard that made his shaving a manly accomplishment rather than a hirsute necessity.

"Here on the sideboard is your hat, Poil — powder a little around your eyes. Just leave papa to me, Poil. *Ach*, how sweet that hat with them roses out of stock looks on you! Come out here the side way — *ach*, how nice it is out here on the porch! How short the days get — dark nearly already at seven! Good-



by, children. Izzy, take your sister by the arm; the whole world don't need to know you're her brother."

"Leave the door on the latch, mamma."

"Have a good time, children. Ain't you going to say good-by to your papa, Poil? Your worst enemy he ain't. Julius, leave Billy alone — honest, he likes that cat better as his family. Tell your papa good-by, Poil."

"I — said — good-by."

"She should say good-by to me only if she wants to. Izzy, when you go out the gate drive back that rooster — I'll wring his little gallivantin' neck if he don't stop roosting in that bush!"

"Good-night, children; take good care of the cars."

"Good-night, mamma . . . papa."

The gate clicked shut, and the two figures moved into the mist of growing gloom; over their heads the trees met and formed across the brick sidewalk a roof as softly dark as the ceiling of a church. Birds chirped.

Mrs. Binswanger leaned her wide, uncorseted figure against a pillar and watched them until a curve in the avenue cut her view, then she dragged a low wicker rocker across the veranda.

"We can sit out on the porch a while yet, Julius. Not like mid-summer it is for your rheumatism."

"Ya, ya. My slippers, Becky."

"Here."

"Ya, ya."

"Look across the yard, will you, Julius. The Schlossmans are still at the supper-table. Fruit gelatin they got. I seen it cooling on the fence. We got new apples on the side-yard tree, you wouldn't believe, Julius. To-morrow I make pies."

"Ya, ya."

The light tulle of early evening hung like a veil, and through it

the sad fragrance of burning leaves, which is autumn's incense, drifted from an adjoining lawn.

"'Sh-h-h-h, chickey — 'sh-h-h-h! Back in the yard I can't keep that rooster, Julius. And to-day for thirty cents I had that paling in the garden fence fixed, too. Honest, to keep a yard like ours going is an expense all the time. People in the city without yards is lucky."

"In all Newton there ain't one like ours. Look, Becky, at that white-rose bush flowering so late just like she was a bride."

"When Izzy was home always, we didn't have the expense of weeding."

"Now when he comes home all he does is change neckties and make trouble."

"*Ach*, my moon vines! Don't get your chair so close, Julius. Look how those white flowers open right in your face. One by one like big stars coming out."

"M-m-m-m and smell, Becky, how good!"

"Here, lemme pull them heavy shoes off for you, papa. Listen, there goes that oriole up in the cherry-tree again. Listen to the thrills he's got in him. Pull, Julius; I ain't no derrick!"

"Ah-h-h, how good it feels to get 'em off! Now light my pipe, Becky. Always when you light it, better it tastes. Hold — there — make out of your hand a cup — there — pu-pu-pu — there! Now sit down by me, Becky!"

"Move over."

"Ach, Becky, when we got our little home like this, with a yard so smooth as my hand, where we don't need shoes or collars, and with our own fruit right under our noses, for why ain't you satisfied?"

"For myself, Julius, believe me it's too good, but for Poil we —"

"Look all what you can see right here from our porch! Look there through the trees at the river; right in front of our eyes it

bends for us. Look what a street we live on. We should worry it ain't in the booming part. Quiet like a temple, with trees on it older as you and me together."

"The caterpillars is bad this year, Julius; trees ain't so cheap, neither. In the city such worries they ain't got."

"For what with a place like this, Becky, with running water and —"

"It's Poil, Julius. Not a thing a beau-ti-fool girl like Poil has out here."

"Nonsense. It's a sin she should want a better place as this. Ain't she got a plush parlor and a piano and —"

"It's like Izzy says, Julius: there's too many fine goils in the city for the boys to come out here on a forty-five-minute ride. What boys has she got out here, Mike Donnely and —"

"*Ach!*"

"That's what we need; just something like that should happen to us. But, believe me, it's happened before when a girl ain't got no better to pick from. How I worry about it you should know."

"Becky, with even such talk you make me sick."

"Mark my word, it's happened before, Julius! That's why I say, Julius, a few months in the city this winter and she should meet the right young man. Take a boy like Max Teitlebaum. Yourself you said how grand and steady he is. Twice with Izzy he's been out here, and not once his eyes off Poil did he take."

"Teitlebaum, with a store twice so big as ours on Sixth Avenue, don't need to look for us — twice they can buy and sell us."

"Is — that — so! To me that makes not one difference. Put Poil in the city, where it don't take an hour to get to be, and, *ach*, almost anything could happen! Not once did he take his eyes off her — such a grand, quiet boy, too."

"When a young man's got thoughts, forty-five minutes' street-car ride don't keep him away."

"Nonsense! I always say I never feel hungry till I see in front of me a good meal. If I have to get dressed and go out and market for it I don't want it. It's the same with marriage. You got to work up in the young man the appetite. What they don't see they don't get hungry for. They got to get eyes bigger as their stomachs first."

"Such talk makes me sick. Suppose she don't get married, ain't she got a good home and —"

"An old maid you want yet! A beau-ti-fool goil like our Poil he wants to make out of her an old maid, or she should break her parents' hearts with a match like Mike Donnely —"

"Becky."

"Aw, Julius, now we got the chance to rent for three months. Say we live them three months at the Wellington Hotel. Say it costs us a little more; everybody always says what a grand provider you are, Julius; let them say a little more, Julius."

"I — I ain't got the money, Becky, I tell you. For me to refuse what you want is like I stick a knife in my heart, but I got poor business, Becky."

"Maybe in the end, Julius, it's the cheapest thing we ever done."

"I can't afford it, Becky."

"For only three months we can go, Julius."

"I got notes, Becky, notes already twice extended. If I don't meet in March God knows where —"

"Ya, ya, Julius; all that talk I know by heart!"

"I ain't getting no younger neither, Becky. Hardly through the insurance examination I could get. I ain't so strong no more. When I get big worries I don't sleep so good. I ain't so well nights, Becky."

"Always the imagination sickness, Julius."

"I ain't so well, I tell you, Becky."

"Last time when all you had was the neuralgia, and you came home from the store like you was dying, Dr. Ellenburg told me hisself right here on this porch that never did he know a man so nervous of dying like you."

"I can't help it, Becky."

"If I was so afraid like you of dying, Julius, not one meal could I enjoy. A healthy man like you with nothing but the rheumatism and a little asthma. Only last week you came home pale like a ghost with a pain in your side, when it wasn't nothing but where your pipe burnt a hole in your pants pocket to give me some more mending to do."

"Just for five minutes you should have felt that pain!"

"Honest, Julius, to be a coward like you for dying it ain't nice — honest it ain't."

"Always, Becky, when I think I ain't always going to be with you and the children such a feeling comes over me."

"*Ach*, Julius, be quiet! Without you I might just as well be dead, too."

"I'm getting old, Becky; sixty-six ain't no spring chicken no more."

"That's right, Julius; stick knives in me."

"Life is short, Becky; we must be happy while we got each other."

"Life *is* short, Julius, and for our children we should do all what we can. We can't always be with them, Julius. We — we must do the right thing by 'em. Like you say we — we're getting old — together, Julius. We don't want nothing to reproach ourselves with."

"Ya, ya, Becky."

Darkness fell thickly, like blue velvet portières swinging together, and stars sprang out in a clear sky.

They rocked in silence, their heads touching. The gray cat,



with eyes like opals, sprang into the hollow of Mr. Binswanger's arm.

"Billy, you come to sit by mamma and me? Ni-ce Bil-ly!"

"We go in now, papa; in the damp you get rheumatism."

"Ya, ya, Becky — hear how he purrs, like an engine."

"Come on, papa; damper every minute it gets."

He rose with his rheumatic jerkiness, placed the cat gently on all fours on the floor, and closed his fingers around the curve of his wife's outstretched arm.

"When — when we go — go to the city, Becky, we don't sublet Billy; we — we take him with us, not, Becky?"

"Yes, papa."

"Ya, ya, Becky."

The chief sponsors for the family hotel are neurasthenia and bridge whist, the inability of the home-maker and the debility of the housekeeper.

Under these invasions Hestia turns out the gas-log, pastes a To Let sign on the windows, locks the front door behind her, and gives the key to the auctioneer.

The family holds out the dining-room clock and a pair of silver candlesticks that came over on the stupendously huge cargo which time and curio dealers have piled upon the good ship *Mayflower*; engages a three-room suite on the ninth floor of a European-plan hotel, and inaugurates upon the sly American paradox of housekeeping in non-housekeeping apartments.

The Wellington Hotel was a rococo haven for such refugees from the modern social choler, and its doors flew open and offered them a family rate, excellent cuisine, quarantine.

Excellent cuisine, however, is a clever but spiceless parody on home cookery.

Mr. Binswanger read his evening menu with the furrow deepening between his eyes.

"Such a soup they got! Mulla-ga-what?"

"'Shh-h-h, Julius; don't talk so loud. Does the whole dining-room got to know you don't know nothing?"

Mrs. Binswanger took nervous résumé of the red-and-gold, bright-lighted dining-room.

"For a plate of noodles soup, Becky, they can have all their mullagatawny! Fifteen cents for a plate of soup, Becky, and at home for that you could make a whole pot full twice so good.

"'Sh-h-h-h, papa."

"Don't 'sh-h-h-h-h me no more neither, Pearlie. Five months, from October to February, I been shooed like I was one of our roosters at home got over in Schlossman's yard. There, you read for me, Izzy; such language I don't know."

Isadore took up a card and crinkled one eye in a sly wink toward his mother and sister.

"*Rinderbrust und Kartoffel Salad, pa, mit Apful Küchen und Kaletraufschnitt.*"

"Ya, ya, make fun yet. A square meal like that should happen to me yet in a highway-robbery place like this."

Mrs. Binswanger straightened her large-bosomed, stiff-corseted figure in its large-design, black-lace basque, and pulled gently at her daughter's flesh-colored chiffon sleeve, which fell from her shoulders like angels' wings.

"Look across the room, Poil. There's Max just coming in the dining-room with his mother. Always the first thing he looks over at our table. Bow, Julius; don't you see across the room the Teitlebaums coming in? I guess old man Teitlebaum is out on the road again."

Miss Binswanger flushed the same delicate pink as her chiffon, and showed her oval teeth in a vivid smile.

"Ain't he silly, though, to-night, mamma! Look, when he holds up two fingers at me it means first he takes his mother up to her pinochle club, and then by nine o'clock he comes back to me."

"How good that woman has got it! Look Poil, another waist she's wearing again."

"Look how he pulls out the chair for his mother, Izzy. It would hurt you to do that for me and mamma, wouldn't it?"

"Say, missy, I learnt manners two years before you ever done anything but hold down the front porch out on Newton Avenue. I'd been meetin' Max Teitlebaum and Ignatz Landauer and that crowd over at the Young Men's Association before you'd ever been to the movie with anybody except Meena Schlossman."

"I don't see that all your good start got you anywheres."

"Don't let swell society go to your head, missy. You ain't got Max yet, neither. You ought to be ashamed to be so crazy about a boy. Wait till I tell you something when we get up-stairs that'll take some of your kink out, missy."

"Children, children, hush your fussing! Julius, don't read all the names off the bill of fare."

Miss Binswanger regarded her brother under level brows, and threw him a retort that sizzed across the table like drops of water on a hot stove-top.

"Anyways, if I was a fellow that couldn't keep a job more than two months at a time I'd lay quiet. I wouldn't be out of a job all the time, and beggin' my father to set me up in business when I was always getting fired from every place I worked."

"Children!"

"Well, he always starts with me, mamma."

"Izzy, ain't you got no respect for your sister? For Gawd's

sakes take that bill of fare away from your papa, Izzy. He'll burn a hole in it. Always the prices he reads out loud till so embarrassed I get. No ears and eyes he has for anything else. He reads and reads, but enough he don't eat to keep alive a bird."

Mr. Binswanger drew his spectacles off his nose, snapped them into a worn leather case and into his vest pocket; a wan smile lay on his lips.

"I got only eyes for you, Becky, eh? All dressed up, ain't you? — black lace yet! What you think of your mamma, children? Young she gets, not?"

"*Ach, Julius!*"

The little bout of tenderness sent a smile around the table, and behind the veil of her lashes Miss Binswanger sent the arrow of a glance across the room.

"Honest, mamma, I wonder if Max sees anything green on me."

"He sees something sweet on you, maybe, Poil. Izzy, pass your papa some radishes. Not a thing does that man eat, and such an appetite he used to have."

"Radishes better as these we get in our yard at home. Ten cents for six radishes! Against my appetite it goes to eat 'em, when in my yard at home —"

"Home, always home!"

"Papa, please don't put your napkin in your collar like a bib. Mamma, make him take it out. Honest, even for the waiter I'm ashamed. How he watches us, too, and laffs behind the tray."

"Leave me alone, Pearlie. My shirt-front I don't use for no bib! Laundry rates in this hold-up place ain't so cheap."

"Mamma, please make him take it out."

"Julius!"

"Look, papa, at the Teitlebaums and Schoenfeldts, laughing at us, papa. Look now at him, mamma; just for to spite me he bends over and drinks his soup out loud out of the tip of his spoon — please, papa."

Mr. Binswanger jerked his napkin from its mooring beneath each ear and peered across at his daughter with his face as deeply creased as a raisin.

"I wish," he said, low in his throat, and with angry emphasis quivering his lips behind the gray and black bristles of his mustache — "ten times a day I wish I was back in my little house in Newton, where I got my comfort and my peace — you children I got to thank for this, you children."

Mr. Isadore Binswanger replaced his spoon in his soup-plate and leaned back against his chair.

"Aw now, papa, for God's sakes don't begin!"

"You good-for-nothing, you! With your hair combed up straight on your head like a girl's, and a pleated shirt like I'd be ashamed to carry in stock, you got no put-in! If I give you five thousand dollars for a business for yourself you don't care so much what kind of manners I got. Five thousand dollars he asks me for to go in business when he ain't got it in him to keep a job for six months."

"The last job wasn't —"

"Right now in this highway-robbery hotel you got me into, I got to pay your board for you — if you want five thousand dollars from me you got to get rid of me some way, for my insurance policy is all I can say. And sometimes I wish you would — easier for me it would be."

"Julius!"

His son crumpled his napkin and tossed it toward the center of the table. His soft, moist lips were twisted in anger, and his voice, under cover of a whisper, trembled with that same anger.



"For what little board you've paid for me I can't hear about it no more. I'll go out and —"

"'Sh-h-h, Izzy — 'sh-h-h, papa, all over the dining-room they can hear you, 'sh-h-h!"

"Home I ain't never denied my children — open doors they get always in my house — but in a highway-robbery hotel, where I can't afford —"

"We got the cheapest family rates here. Such rates we get here, children, and highway robbery your father calls it!"

"Five months we been in the city, and three months already a empty house standing out there waiting, and nothing from it coming in. A house I love like my life, a house what me and your mamma wish we was back in every minute of the day!"

"I only said, Julius, for myself I like my little home best, but —"

"I ain't got the strength for the street-car ride no more. I ain't got appetite for this sloppy American food no more. I can't breathe no more in that coop up-stairs. Right now you should know how my feet hurt for slippers; a collar I got to wear to supper when like a knife it cuts me. I can't afford this. I got such troubles with business I only wish for one day you should have 'em. I want my little house, my porch, my vines, and my chickens. I want my comforts. My son ain't my boss."

Isadore pushed back from the table, his jaw low and sullen.

"I ain't going to sit through a meal and be abused like — like I was a —"

"You ain't got to sit; stand up, then."

"Izzy — for God's sakes, Izzy, the people! Julius, so help me if I come down to a meal with you again. Look, Julius, for God's sake — the Teitlebaums are watching us — the people! Smile at me, Poil, like we was joking. Izzy, if you leave this

table now I — I can't stand it! Laugh, Poil, like we was having our little fun among us."

The women exchanged the ghastly simulacrum of a smile, and the meal resumed in silence. Only small beads sprang out on the shiny surface of Mr. Binswanger's head like dewdrops on the glossy surface of leaves, and twice his fork slipped and clattered from his hand.

"So excited you get right away, Julius. Nervous as a cat you are."

"I — I ain't got the strength no more, Becky. Pink sleeping tablets I got to take yet to make me sleep. I ain't got the strength."

"'Shh-h-h, Julius; don't get excited. In the spring we go home. You don't want, Julius, to spoil everything right this minute. Ain't it enough the way our Poil has come out in these five months? Such a grand time that goil has had this winter. Do you want that the Teitlebaums should know all our business and spoil things?"

"I — I wish sometimes that name I had never heard in my life. In my days a young girl —"

"'Shh-h-h, Julius; we won't talk about it now — we change the subject."

"I —"

"Look over there, will you, Poil? Always extras the Teitlebaums have on their table. Paprica, and what is that red stuff? Chili sauce! Such service we don't get. Pink carnations on their table, too. To-morrow at the desk I complain. Our money is just as good as theirs."

Miss Binswanger raised her harried eyes from her plate and smiled at her mother; she was like a dark red rose, trembling, titillating, and with dewy eyes.

"Don't stare so, mamma."

"Izzy, are you going to stay home to-night? One night it won't hurt you. Like you run around nights to dance-halls ain't nothing to be proud of."

"Now start something, mamma, so pa can jump on me again. If Pearlie and Max are going to use the front room this evening, what shall I do? Sit in a corner till he's gone and I can go to bed?"

"I should care if he goes to dance-halls or not. What I say, Becky, don't make no difference to my son. Take how I begged him to hold on his job!"

"If you're done your dessert wait till we get up-stairs, papa. The dining-room knows already enough of our business."

Miss Binswanger pushed back from the table to her feet. Tears rose in a sheer film across her eyes, but she smiled with her lips and led the procession of her family from the gabbling dining-room, her small, dark head held upward by the check-rein of scorched pride and the corner of her tear-dimmed glance for the remote table with the centerpiece of pink carnations.

By what seemed demoniac aforethought the Binswanger three-room suite was rigidly impervious to sunlight, air, and daylight. Its infinitesimal sitting-room, which the jerking backward of a couch-cover transformed into Mr. Isadore Binswanger's bedchamber, afforded a one-window view of a long, narrow shaft which rose ten stories from a square of asphalt courtyard, up from which the heterogeneous fumes of cookery wafted like smoke through a legitimate flue.

Mr. Binswanger dropped into a veteran arm-chair that had long since finished duty in the de luxe suite, and breathed onward through a beard as close-napped as Spanish moss.

He was suddenly old and as withered as an aspen leaf trembling on its rotten stem. Vermiculate cords of veins ran through the flesh like the chirography of pain written in the

blue of an indelible pencil; yellow crow's-feet, which rayed outward from his eyes, were deep as claw-prints in damp clay.

"Becky, help me off with my shoes; heavy like lead they feel."

"Poil, unlace your papa's shoes. Since I got to dress for dinner I can't stoop no more."

Miss Binswanger tugged daintily at her father's boots, staggering backward at each pull.

"*Ach*, go way, Pearlie! Better than that I can do myself."

"See, mamma; nothing suits him."

Mrs. Binswanger regarded her husband's batrachian sallowness with anxious eyes; her large bosom heaved under its showy lace yoke, and her short, dimpled hands twirled at their rings.

"To-night, Julius, if you don't do like the doctor says I telephone him to come. That a man should be such a coward! It don't do you no good to take only one sleeping-tablet; two, he said, is what you need."

"Too much sleeping-powder is what killed old man Knauss."

"*Ach*, Julius, you heard yourself what Dr. Ellenburg said. Six of the little pink tablets he said it would take to kill a man. How can two of 'em hurt you? Already by the bed I got the box of 'em waiting, Julius, with an orange so they don't even taste."

"It ain't doctors and their *gedinks*, Becky, can do me good. Pink tablets can't make me sleep. I — *ach*, Becky, I'm tired — tired."

Isadore rose from the couch-bed and punched his head-print out of the cushion.

"Lay here, pa."

"Na, na, I go me to bed. Such a thing full of lumps don't rest me like a sofa at home. Na, I go me to bed, Becky."

Isadore relaxed to the couch once more, pillowed his head on

interlaced hands, yawned to the ceiling, blew two columns of cigarette-smoke through his nostrils, and watched them curl upward.

"This ain't so worse, pa."

"I go me to bed."

"For a little while, Julius, can't you stay up? At nine o'clock comes Max to see Poil. I always say a young man thinks more of a young girl when her parents stay in the room a minute."

Isadore fitted his thumbs in his waistcoat arm-holes and flung one reclining limb over the other.

"What Max Teitlebaum thinks of Pearlle I already know. To-day he invited me to lunch with him."

"Izzy!"

"Izzy! Why you been so close-mouthed?"

Mrs. Binswanger threw her short, heavy arm full length across the table-top and leaned toward her son, so that the table-lamp lighted her face with its generous scallop of chin and exacerbated the concern in her eyes.

"You had lunch to-day with Max Teitlebaum, and about Poil you talked!"

"That's what I said."

Miss Binswanger leaned forward in her low rocker, suddenly pink as each word had been a fillip to her blood, and a faint terra-cotta ran under the olive of her skin, lighting it.

"Like — fun — you — did!"

"All right then, missy, I'm lyin', and won't say no more."

"I didn't mean it, Izzy!"

"Izzy, tell your sister what he said."

"Well, right to my face she contradicts me."

"Please, Izzy!"

"Well, he — he likes you, all righty —"



"Did he say that about me, honest, Izz?"

Her breath came sweet as thyme between her open lips, and her eyes could not meet her mother's gaze, which burned against her lids.

"See, Poil! Wake up a minute, papa, and listen. When I mentioned Max Teitlebaum, papa, you always said a grand boy like one of the Teitlebaum boys, with such prospects, ain't got no time for a goil like our Poil. Always I told you that you got to work up the appetite. See, papa, how things work out! See, Poil! What else did he have to say, Izzy — he likes her, eh?"

Isadore turned on his side and flicked a rim of ash off his cigarette with a manicured forefinger.

"Don't get excited too soon, ma. He didn't come out plain and say anything, but I guess a boy like Max Teitlebaum thinks we don't need a brick house to fall on us."

"What you mean, Izzy?"

"What I mean? Say, ain't it as plain as the nose on your face? You don't need two brick houses to fall on you, do you?"

Mrs. Binswanger admitted to a mental phthisis, and threw out her hands in a gesture of helplessness.

"Believe me, Izzy, maybe I am dumb. So bad my head works when your papa worries me, but what you mean I don't know."

"Me neither, Izzy!"

"Say, there ain't much to tell. He likes Pearl — that much he wasn't bashful to me about. He likes Pearl, and he wants to go in the general store and ladies' furnishing goods business. Just clothing like his father's store he hates. Why should he stay in a business, he says, that is already built up? His two married brothers, he says, is enough with his father in the one business."

"Such an ambitious boy always anxious to do for hisself. I wish, Izzy, you had some of his ambitions. You hear, Poil, in the same business as papa he wants to go?"

Mrs. Binswanger rocked complacently, a smile crawled across her lips, and she nodded rhythmically to the tilting of her rocking-chair, her eyes closed in the pleasant phantasmagoria of a dream.

Mr. Binswanger slumped lower in his chair.

"A good head for business that Max Teitlebaum has on him. Like your mamma says, Izzy, you should have one just half so good."

"There you go again, pa, pickin', pickin'! If you'd give a fellow a start and lend him a little capital — I'd have some ambition, too, and start for myself."

Mr. Binswanger leaped forward full stretch, as a jetty of flame shoots through a stream of oil.

"For yourself! On what? From where would I get it? Cut it out from my heart? Two months already I begged you to come out by me in the store and see if you can't help start something to get back the trade — How we need young blood in the store to get —"

"Aw, I —"

"Five thousand dollars I give you for to lose in the ladies' ready-to-wear. Another white elephant we need in the family yet. Not five thousand dollars outside my insurance I got to my name, and even if I did have it I wouldn't —"

"Julius!"

"I mean it, so help me! Even if I did have it, not a cent to a boy what don't listen to his old father."

"For God's sakes, pa, quit your hollering; if you ain't got it to your name I'm sorry for Pearlle."

"For me?"

"You think, pa, a boy like Max Teitlebaum, a boy that banker Finburg's daughter is crazy after, is getting married only because you got a nice daughter?"

"What do you mean, Izzy?"

"The woods are full of 'em just as nice. I didn't need no brick house to fall on me to-day at lunch. He didn't come right out and say nothing, but when he said he wanted to get in a business he could build up, right away I seen what he meant."

"What?"

"Sure I seen it. I guess his father gives him six or seven thousand dollars to get his start, and just so much he wants from the girl's side. He can get it easy, too. If — if you'd fork over, pa, I — him and I could start maybe together and —"

"You — you —"

"Your papa, Izzy, can do for his girl just like the best can do for theirs — Julius, can't you?"

"*Gott in Himmel!* I — I — you — you pack of wolfs, you!"

"Such names you can't call your wife, Julius! Just let me tell you that! Such names you can't call me!"

Anger trembled in Mrs. Binswanger's vocal cords like current running over a wire. But Mr. Binswanger sprang suddenly to his feet and crashed the white knuckles of his clenched fist down on the table with a force that broke the flesh. The red lights of anger lay mirrored in the pool of his eyes like danger lanterns on a dark bridge are reflected in black water.

"Wolfs — wolfs, all of you! You — you — to-night you got me where I am at an end! To-night you got to *know* — I — I can't keep it in no more — you got — to *know* to-night — to-night!"

His voice caught in a tight knot of strangulation; he was dithering and palsied.

"To-night — you — you got to know!"

A sudden trembling took Mrs. Binswanger.

"For God's sakes, know what, Julius — know what?"

"I'm done for! I'm gone under! Till it happened you wouldn't believe me. Two years I seen it coming, two years I been fightin' and fightin' — fightin' it by myself! And now for yourselves you look in the papers two weeks from to-morrow, the first of March, and see — I'm done for — I'm gone under, I —"

"Julius — my God, you — you ain't, Julius, you ain't!"

His voice rose like a gale.

"I'm gone under — I ain't got twenty cents on the dollar. I'm gone, Becky. Beat up! To-morrow two weeks the creditors, they're on me! My last extension expires, and they're on me. I been fightin' and fightin'. Twenty cents on the dollar I can't meet, Becky — I can't, Becky, I can't! I been fightin' and fightin', but I can't, Becky — I — can't! I'm gone!"

"Pa."

"Julius, Julius, for God's sakes, you — you don't mean it, Julius — you — don't — mean it — you're fooling us — Julius!"

Small, cold tears welled to the corners of his eyes.

"I'm gone, Becky — and now he — he wants the shirt off my back — he can have it, God knows. But — but — *ach*, Becky — I — I wish I could have saved *you* — but that a man twice so strong as his father — *ach*, *Gott*, what — what's the use? I'm gone, Becky, gone!"

Mr. Isadore Binswanger swung to his feet and regarded his parent with the dazed eyes of a sleep-walker awakening on a perilous ledge.

"Aw, pa, for — for God's sake, why didn't you tell a fellow?"

I — we — aw, pa, I — I can knuckle down if I got to. Gee whiz! how was a fellow to know? You — you been cuttin' up about everything since — since we was kids; aw, pa — please — gimme a chance, pa, I can knuckle down — pa — pa!"

He approached the racked form of his father as if he would throw himself a stepping-stone at his feet, and then because his voice stuck in his throat and ached until the tears sprang to his eyes he turned suddenly and went out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

The echo hung for a moment.

Miss Binswanger lay whitely in her chair, weakened as if the blood had flowed out of her heart. From the granitoid square at the base of the air-shaft came the rattle of after-dinner dishes and the babble of dialect. Mr. Binswanger wept the tears of physical weakness.

"I — I'm gone, Becky. What you want for Poil I can't do. I'm gone under. We got to start over again. It was the inter-urban done it, Becky. I needed new capital to meet the new competition. I — I could have stood up under it then, Becky, but — but —"

"*Ach*, my husband — for myself I don't care. *Ach*, my husband."

"I — I'm gone, Becky — gone."

He rose to his feet and shambled feebly to his bed-room, his fingers feeling of the furniture for support, and his breath coming in the long wheezes of dry tears. And in the cradle of her mother's arms Miss Binswanger wept the hot tears of black despair; they seeped through the showy lace yoke and scalded her mother's heart.

"Oh, my baby! *Ach*, my husband! A good man like him, a good man like him!"

"Don't cry, mamma, don't — cry."



"Nothing he ever refused me, and now when we should be able to do for our children and —"

"Don't cry, mamma, don't cry."

"If — if he had the money — for a boy like Max — he'd give it, Poil. Such a good husband — such — *ach*, I go me in to papa now — poor papa. I've been bad, Poil; we must make it up to him; we —"

"'Sh-h-h!"

"We got to start over again, Poil — to the bone I'll work my fingers, I —"

"'Shh-h-h, mamma, 'sh-h-h — somebody's knocking."

They raised their tear-ravaged faces in the attitude of listening, their eyes salt-bitten and glazed.

"It's — it's Izzy, baby. See how sorry he gets right away. He ain't a bad boy, Poil, only always I've spoiled him. Come in, my boy — come in, and go in to your papa."

The door swung open and fanned backward the stale air in a sharp gust, and the women sprang apart mechanically as automaton, the sagging, open-mouthed vacuity of surprise on Mrs. Binswanger's face, the tears still wet on her daughter's cheeks and lying lightly on her lashes like dew.

"Mr. Teitlebaum."

"Max!"

Mr. Teitlebaum hesitated at the threshold, the flavor of his amorous spirit tasty on his lips and curving them into a smile.

"That's my name! Hello, Pearlie girlie! How-dye-do, Mrs. Binswanger — what — what —"

He regarded them with dark, quiet eyes, the quick red of embarrassment running high in his face and under his tight-fitting cap of close-nap black hair.

"Ah, excuse me; I might have known. I — I'm too early. Like my mother says, I was in such a hurry to — to get back

here again I — I nearly got out and pushed the Subway — I — you must excuse me. I —”

“No, no; sit down, Mr. Teitlebaum. Pearlie ain’t feelin’ so well this evening; she’s all right now, though. Such a cold she’s got, ain’t you, Poil?”

“Yes — yes. Such a cold I got. Sit — sit down, Max.”

He regarded her with the rims of his eyes stretched wide in anxiety.

“Down at supper so well you looked, Pearlie; I says to my mother, like a flower you looked.”

A fog of tears rose sheer before her.

“Her papa, Mr. Teitlebaum, he ain’t so well, neither. Just now he went to bed, and he — he said to you I should give his excuses.”

“So! Ain’t that too bad, now!”

“Sit down, Max, there, next to mamma.”

He leaned across the table toward the little huddle of her figure, the gentle villanelle of his emotions writ frankly across his features.

“Pearlie —”

“She’ll be all right in a minute, Mr. Teitlebaum — like her papa she is, always so afraid of a little sickness.”

“Pearlie, ain’t you going to look at me?”

She sprang from his light hand on her shoulder, and the tears grew to little globules, trembled, fell. Then a sudden rod of resolution straightened her back.

“We — I been lying to you, Max; I ain’t — sick!”

“Poil!”

“No, no; it’s best we tell the truth, mamma.”

“Ya, ya. Oh, my —”

“We — we’re in big trouble, Max. Business trouble. The store, ever — ever since the traction — it ain’t been the same.”

"I know, little Pearlle. I —"

"Wait a minute, Max. We — we ain't what you maybe think we are. To-morrow two weeks we got to meet creditors and extension notes. We can't pay with even twenty cents on the dollar. We're gone under, Max!"

"I —"

"We ain't got it to meet them with. Papa — if a man like papa couldn't make it go nobody could —"

"Such a man, Mr. Teitlebaum, so honest, so —"

"'Shh-h-h, mamma."

"It's our — my fault, Max. He was afraid even last year, but I — even then I was the one that wanted the expense of the city. Mamma didn't want it — he didn't — it — was — me — I — I —"

"My fault, too, Poil — *ach, Gott*, my fault! How I drove him! How I drove him!"

"We — we got to go back home, Max. We're going back and help him to begin over again. We — we been driving him like a pack of wolves. He never could refuse nobody nothing. If he thought mamma wanted the moon up he was ready to go for it; even when we was kids he —"

"*Ach*, my husband, such a good provider he's always been! Such a husband!"

"Always we got our way out of him. But to-night — to-night, Max, right here in this chair all *little* he looked all of a sudden. So little! His back all crooked and all tired and — and I done it, Max — I ain't what you think I am — oh, God, I done it!"

"*Ach*, my —"

"Don't cry, mamma. 'Sh-h-h-h! Ain't you ashamed, with Mr. Teitlebaum standing right here? You must excuse her, Max, so terrible upset she is. 'Sh-h-h-h, mamma — 'sh-h-h-h!"

We're going back home and begin over again. 'Sh-h-h-h! You won't have to dress for supper no more like you hate. We'll be home in time for your strawberry-preserves season, mamma, and rhubarb stew out of the garden, like papa loves. 'Sh-h-h-h! You must excuse her, Max — you must excuse me, too, to-night — you — come some other time — please."

"Pearlie!" He came closer to the circle of light, and his large features came out boldly. "Pearlie, don't you cry neither, little girl —"

"I — I ain't."

"All what you tell me I know already."

"Max!"

"Mr. Teitlebaum!"

"You must excuse me, Mrs. Binswanger, but in nearly the same line of business news like that travels faster than you think. Only to-day I heard for sure — how — shaky things stand. You got my sympathies, Mrs. Binswanger, but — but such a failure don't need to happen."

Mrs. Binswanger clutched two hands around a throat too dry to swallow.

"He can't stand it. He isn't strong enough. It will kill him. Always so honest to the last penny he's been, Mr. Teitlebaum, but never when he used to complain would I believe him. Always a great one for a poor mouth he was, Mr. Teitlebaum, even when he had it. So plain he always was, and now I — I've broke him — I — I —"

"'Sh-h-h-h, mamma! Do you want papa should hear you in the next room? 'Sh-h-h-h! Please, you must excuse her, Max."

"Pearlie" — he placed his hand lightly on her shoulder — "Pearlie — Mrs. Binswanger, you must excuse me, too, but I got to say it — while — while I got the courage. Can't you

guess it, little Pearlle? I'm in love with you. I'm in love with you, Pearlle, since the first month you came to this hotel to live."

"Max!"

"*Ach, Gott!*"

"I only got this to say to you: I love you, little Pearlle. To-day, when I heard the news, I was sorry, Pearlle, and — and glad, too. It made things look easier for me. Right away I invited Izzy to lunch so like a school-boy I could hint. I — two years I been waiting to get out of the store, Pearlle, where there ain't a chance for me to build up nothing. Like I told Izzy to-day, I want to find a run-down business that needs building up where I can accomplish things."

"Max!"

"I wanted him to know what I meant, but like — like a school-boy so mixed up I got. Eight thousand dollars I got laying for a opening. This failure — this failure don't need to happen, Pearlle. With new capital and new blood we don't need to be afraid of tractions and competitions — with me and Izzy, and my eight thousand dollars put in out there, we — we — but this ain't no time to talk business. I — you must excuse me, Mrs. Binswanger, but — but —"

"Poil, my baby! Max!"

"I love you, Pearlle girlie. Ever since we been in the same hotel together, when I seen you every day fresh like a flower and so fine, I — I been heels over head in love with you, Pearlle. You should know how my father and my married brothers tease me. I — I love you, Pearlle —"

She relaxed to his approaching arms, and let her head fall back to his shoulder so that her face, upturned to his, was like a dark flower, and he kissed her where the tears lay wet on her petal-smooth cheeks and on her lips that trembled.



"Max!"

"My little girlie!"

Mrs. Binswanger groped through tear-blinded eyes.

"This — this — ain't no place for a — old woman, children — this — this — *ach*, what I'm sayin' I don't know! Like in a dream I feel."

"Me, too, mamma; me, too. Like a dream. Ah, Max!"

"I tiptoe in and surprise papa, children. I surprise papa. *Ach*, my children, my children, like in a dream I feel."

She smiled at them with the tears streaming from her face like rain down a window-pane, opened the door to the room adjoining gently, and closed it more gently behind her. Her face was bathed in a peace that swam deep in her eyes like reflected moonlight trailing down on a lagoon, her lips trembled in the hysteria of too many emotions. She held the silence for a moment, and remained with her wide back to the door, peering across the dim-lit room at the curve-backed outline of her husband's figure, hunched in a sitting posture on the side of the bed.

Beside him on the white coverlet a green tin box with a convex top like a miniature trunk lay on one end, its contents, bits of old-fashioned jewelry, and a folded blue document with a splashy red seal, scattered about the bed.

She could hear him wheeze out the moany, long-drawn breaths that characterized his sleepless nights, his face the color of old ivory, wry and etched in the agony of carrying his trembling palm closer, closer to his mouth.

Suddenly Mrs. Binswanger cried out, a cry that was born in the unexplored regions of her heart, wild, primordial, full of terror.

It was as if fear had churned her blood too thick to flow, and through her paralysis tore the spasm of a half-articulate shriek.

"Jule — Jule-ius — Jule-ius!"

His hand jerked from his lips reflexly, so that the six small pink tablets in the trembling palm rolled to the corners of the room. His blood-driven face fell backward against the pillow, and he relaxed frankly into short, dry sobs, hollow and hacking like the coughing of a cat. His feet lay in the little heap of jewelry and across the crumpled insurance policy.

"Becky — it — it's all what I — I could do — it's — it — "

"Oh, my God! Oh, my God!"

She dragged her trembling limbs across the room to his side. She held him to her so close that the showy lace yoke transformed its imprint from her bosom to the flesh of his cheek. She could feel his sobs of hysteria beating against her breast, and her own tears flowed.

They racked her like a storm tearing on the mad wings of a gale; they scalded down her cheeks into the furrows of her neck. She held him tight in the madness of panic and exultation, and his arm crept around her wide waist, and his tired head relaxed to her breast, and her hands were locked tight about him and would not let him go.

"We — we're going *home*, Julius — we — we're going home."

"Ya, ya, Becky, it's — it's all right. Ya, ya, Becky."

## KATIE WINS A HOME <sup>1</sup>

By RING W. LARDNER

OH yes, we been back here quite a wile. And we're liable to be here quite a wile. This town's good enough for me and it suits the Mrs. too, though they didn't neither one of us appreciate it till we'd give New York a try. If I was running the South Bend Boosters' club, I'd make everybody spend a year on the Gay White Way. They'd be so tickled when they got to South Bend that you'd never hear them razz the old burg again. Just yesterday we had a letter from Katie, asking us would we come and pay her a visit. She's a regular New Yorker now. Well, I didn't have to put up no fight with my Mrs. Before I could open my pan she says, "I'll write and tell her we can't come; that you're looking for a job and don't want to go nowheres just now."

Well, they's some truth in that. I don't want to go nowheres and I'll take a job if it's the right kind. We could get along on the interest from Ella's money, but I'm tired of laying round. I didn't do a tap of work all the time I was east and I'm out of the habit, but the days certainly do drag when a man ain't got nothing to do and if I can find something where I don't have to travel, I'll try it out.

But the Mrs. has still got most of what the old man left her and all and all, I'm glad we made the trip. I more than broke even by winning pretty close to \$10,000 on the ponies down there. And we got Katie off our hands, which was one of the objects of us going in the first place — that and because the

<sup>1</sup> From *The Big Town*, by Ring W. Lardner. Copyright, 1921. Used by special permission of the publishers, The Bobbs-Merrill Company.

two gals wanted to see Life. So I don't grudge the time we spent, and we had some funny experiences when you look back at them. Anybody does that goes on a tour like that with a cuckoo like Katie. You hear a lot of songs and gags about mother-in-laws. But I could write a book of them about sister-in-laws that's twenty years old and pretty and full of peace and good will towards Men.

Well, after the blow-off with Daley, Long Island got too slow, besides costing us more than we could afford. So the gals suggested moving back in Town, to a hotel called the Graham on Sixty-seventh Street that somebody had told them was reasonable.

They called it a family hotel, but as far as I could see, Ella and I was the only ones there that had ever forced two dollars on the clergy. Outside of the transients, they was two song writers and a couple of gals that had their hair pruned and wrote for the papers, and the rest of the lodgers was boys that had got penned into a sixteen-foot ring with Benny Leonard by mistake. They looked like they'd spent many an evening hanging onto the ropes during the rush hour.

When we'd staid there two days, Ella and Katie was ready to pack up again.

"This is just a joint," said Ella. "The gals may be all right, but they're never in, only to sleep. And the men's impossible; a bunch of low prize-fighters."

I was for sticking, on account of the place being cheap, so I said:

"Second prize ain't so low. And you're overlooking the two handsome tune thieves. Besides, what's the difference who else lives here as long as the rooms is clean and they got a good restaurant? What did our dude cellmates out on Long Island get us? Just trouble!"

But I'd of lose the argument as usual only for Kate oversleeping herself. It was our third morning at the Graham and her and Ella had it planned to go and look for a better place. But Katie didn't get up till pretty near noon and Ella went without her. So it broke so's Sis had just came downstairs and turned in her key when the two bellhops reeled in the front door bulging with baggage and escorting Mr. Jimmy Ralston. Yes, Jimmy Ralston the comedian. Or comic, as he calls it.

Well, he ain't F. X. Bushman, as you know. But no one that seen him could make the mistake of thinking he wasn't somebody. And he looked good enough to Kate so as she waited till the clerk had him fixed up, and then ast who he was. The clerk told her and she told us when the Mrs. come back from her hunt. Ella begin to name a few joints where we might move, but it seemed like Sis had changed her mind.

"Oh," she says, "let's stay here a wile longer, a week anyway."

"What's came over you!" ast Ella. "You just said last night that you was bored to death here."

"Maybe we won't be so bored now," said Kate, smiling. "The Graham's looking up. We're entertaining a celebrity — Jimmy Ralston of the Follies."

Well, they hadn't none of us ever seen him on the stage, but of course we'd heard of him. He'd only just started with the Follies, but he'd made a name for himself at the Winter Garden, where he broke in two or three years ago. And Kate said that a chorus gal she'd met — Jane Abbott — had told her about Ralston and what a scream he was on a party.

"He's terribly funny when he gets just the right number of drinks," says Kate.

"Well, let's stay then," says Ella. "It'll be exciting to know a real actor."



"I would like to know him," says Katie, "not just because he's on the stage, but I think it'd be fun to set and listen to him talk. He must say the screamingest things! If we had him round we wouldn't have to play cards or nothing for entertainment. Only they say it makes people fat to laugh."

"If I was you, I'd want to get fat," I said. "Looking like an E string hasn't started no landslide your way."

"Is he attractive?" ast the Mrs.

"Well," said Kate, "he isn't handsome, but he's striking looking. You wouldn't never think he was a comedian. But then, ain't it generally always true that the driest people have sad faces?"

"That's a joke!" I said. "Did you ever see Bryan when he didn't look like somebody was tickling his feet?"

"We'll have to think up some scheme to get introduced to him," says Ella.

"It'll be tough," I says. "I don't suppose they's anybody in the world harder to meet than a member of the Follies, unless it's an Elk in a Pullman washroom."

"But listen," says Kate: "We don't want to meet him till we've saw the show. It'd be awfully embarrassing to have him ask us how we liked the Follies and we'd have to say we hadn't been to it."

"Yes," said the Mrs., "but still if we tell him we haven't been to it, he may give us free passes."

"Easy!" I said. "And it'd take a big load off his mind. They say it worries the Follies people half sick wondering what to do with all their free passes."

"Suppose we go to-night!" says Kate. "We can drop in a hotel somewheres and get seats. The longer we don't go, the longer we won't meet him."

"And the longer we don't meet him," I says, "the longer till he gives you the air."

"I'm not thinking of Mr. Ralston as a possible suitor," says Katie, swelling up. "But I do want to get acquainted with a man that don't bore a person to death."

"Well," I says, "if this baby's anything like the rest of your gentleman friends, he won't hardly be round long enough for that."

I didn't make no kick about going to the show. We hadn't spent no money since we'd moved back to Town and I was as tired as the gals of setting up in the room, playing rummy. They said we'd have to dress, and I kicked just from habit, but I'd got past minding that end of it. They was one advantage in dolling up every time you went anywheres. It meant an hour when they was no chance to do something even sillier.

We couldn't stop to put on the nose bag at the Graham because the women was scared we'd be too late to get tickets. Besides, when you're dressed for dinner, you at least want the waiter to be the same. So we took a taxi down to the Spencer, bought Follies seats in the ninth row, and went in to eat. It's been in all the papers that the price of food has came down, but the hotel man can't read. They fined us eleven smackers for a two-course banquet that if the Woman's Guild, here, would dast soak you four bits a plate for it, somebody'd write a nasty letter to the *News-Times*.

We got in the theater a half hour before the show begin. I put in the time finding out what the men will wear, and the gals looked up what scenes Ralston'd be in. He was only on once in each act. They don't waste much time on a comedian in the Follies. It don't take long to spring the two gags they can think up for him in a year, and besides, he just interferes with the big gal numbers, where Bunny Granville or somebody dreams of the different flappers he danced with at the prom, and the souvenirs they give him; and one by one the different

gals writhes in, dressed like the stage director thinks they dress at the female colleges — a Wesley gal in pink tights, a Vassar dame in hula-hula, and a Smith gal with a sombrero and a sailor suit. He does a couple of steps with them and they each hand him a flower or a vegetable to remember them by. The song winds up:

*But my most exclusive token  
Is a little hangnail broken  
Off the gal from Gussie's School for Manicures.*

And his real sweet patootie comes on made up as a scissors.

You've saw Ralston? He's a good comedian; no getting away from that. The way he fixes up his face, you laugh just to look at him. I yelled when I first seen him. He was supposed to be an office boy and he got back late from lunch and the boss ast him what made him late and he said he stopped to buy the extra. So the boss ast him what extra and he says the extra about the New York society couple getting married. So the boss said, "Why, they wouldn't print an extra about that. They's a New York society couple married most every day." So Ralston said, "Yes, but this couple is both doing it for the first time."

I don't remember what other gags he had, and they're old anyway by now. But he was a hit, especially with Ella and Kate. They screamed so loud I thought we'd get the air. If he didn't say a word, he'd be funny with that fool make-up and that voice.

I guess if it wasn't for me the gals would of insisted on going back to the stage door after the show and waiting for him to come out. I've saw Katie bad a lot of times, but never as cuckoo as this. It wasn't no case of love at first or second sight. You couldn't be stuck on this guy from seeing him. But she'd always been kind of stage-struck and was crazy over

the idear of getting acquainted with a celebrity, maybe going round to places with him, and having people see her with Jimmy Ralston, the comedian. And then, of course, most anybody wants to meet a person that can make you laugh.

I managed to persuade them that the best dope would be to go back to the Graham and wait for him to come home; maybe we could fix it up with the night clerk to introduce us. I told them that irregardless of what you read in books, they's some members of the theatrical profession that occasionally visits the place where they sleep. So we went to the hotel and set in the lobby for an hour and a half, me trying to keep awake wile the gals played Ralston's part of the show over again a couple thousand times. They's nothing goes so big with me as listen-  
ing to people repeat gags out of a show that I just seen.

The clerk had been tipped off and when Ralston finally come in and went to get his key, I strolled up to the desk like I was after mine. The clerk introduced us.

"I want you to meet my wife and sister-in-law," I said.

"Some other time," says Ralston. "They's a matinée tomorrow and I got to run off to bed."

So off he went and I got bawled out for Ziegfeld having mat-  
inées. But I squared myself two days afterwards when we went in the restaurant for lunch. He was just having break-  
fast and the three of us stopped by his table. I don't think he remembered ever seeing me before, but anyway he got up and shook hands with the women. Well, you couldn't never accuse Ella of having a faint heart, and she says:

"Can't we set down with you, Mr. Ralston? We want to tell you how much we enjoyed the Follies."

So he says, sure, set down, but I guess we would of anyway.

"We thought it was a dandy show," says Katie.

"It ain't a bad troupe," says Ralston.

"If you'll pardon me getting personal," said Ella, "we thought you was the best thing in it."

He looked like he'd strain a point and forgive her.

"We all just yelled!" says Katie. "I was afraid they'd put us out, you made us laugh so hard."

"Well," says Ralston, "I guess if they begin putting people out for that, I'd have to leave the troupe."

"It wouldn't be much of a show without you," says Ella.

"Well, all that keeps me in it is friendship for Ziggy," says Ralston. "I said to him last night, I says, 'Ziggy, I'm going to quit the troupe. I'm tired and I want to rest a wile.' So he says, 'Jim, don't quit or I'll have to close the troupe. I'll give you fifteen hundred a week to stay.' I'm getting a thousand now. But I says to him, I said, 'Ziggy, it ain't a question of money. What I want is a troupe of my own, where I get a chance to do serious work. I'm sick of making a monkey of myself in front of a bunch of saps from Nyack that don't appreciate no art but what's wrapped up in a stocking.' So he's promised that if I'll stick it out this year, he'll star me next season in a serious piece."

"Is he giving you the five hundred raise?" I ast him.

"I wouldn't take it," said Ralston. "I don't need money."

"At that, a person can live pretty cheap at this hotel," I says.

"I didn't move here because it was cheap," he said. "I moved here to get away from the pests — women that wants my autograph or my picture. And all they could say how much they enjoyed my work and how did I think up all them gags, and so forth. No real artist likes to talk about himself, especially to people that don't understand. So that's the reason why I left the Ritz, so's I'd be left alone, not to save money. And I don't save no money, neither. I've got the best suite in the house — bedroom, bath and study."



"What do you study?" ast Kate.

"The parts I want to play," he says; "Hamlet and Macbeth and Richard."

"But you're a comedian," says Kate.

"It's just a stepping stone," said Ralston.

He'd finished his breakfast and got up.

"I must go to my study and work," he says. "We'll meet again."

"Yes, indeed," says Ella. "Do you always come right back here nights after the show?"

"When I can get away from the pests," he says.

"Well," says Ella, "suppose you come up to our rooms to-night and we'll have a bite to eat. And I think the husband can give you a little liquid refreshments if you ever indulge."

"Very little," he says. "What is your room number?"

So the Mrs. told him and he said he'd see us after the show that night, and walked out.

"Well," said Ella, "how do you like him?"

"I think he's wonderful!" says Katie. "I didn't have no idear he was so deep, wanting to play Hamlet."

"Pretty near all comedians has got that bug," I says.

"Maybe he's different when you know him better," said Ella.

"I don't want him to be different," says Kate.

"But he was so serious," said the Mrs. "He didn't say nothing funny."

"Sure he did," I says. "Didn't he say artists hate to talk about themselves?"

Pretty soon the waiter come in with our lunch. He ast us if the other gentleman was coming back.

"No," said Ella. "He's through."

"He forgot his check," says the dish smasher.

"Oh, never mind!" says Ella. "We'll take care of that."

"Well," I says, "I guess the bird was telling the truth when he said he didn't need no money."

I and the gals spent the evening at a picture show and stopped at a delicatessen on the way home to stock up for the banquet. I had a quart and a pint of yearling rye, and a couple of bottles of McAllister that they'd fined me fifteen smackers apiece for and I wanted to save them, so I told Kate that I hoped her friend would get comical enough on the rye.

"He said he drunk very little," she reminded me.

"Remember, don't make him talk about himself," said the Mrs. "What we want is to have him feel at home, like he was with old friends, and then maybe he'll warm up. I hope we don't wake the whole hotel, laughing."

Well, Ralston showed about midnight. He'd remembered his date and apologized for not getting there before.

"I like to walk home from the theater," he says. "I get some of my funniest idears wile I walk."

I come to the conclusion later that he spent practically his whole life riding.

Ella's and my room wasn't no gymnasium for size and after the third drink, Ralston tried to get to the dresser to look at himself in the glass, and knocked a \$30 vase for a corpse. This didn't go very big with the Mrs., but she forced a smile and would of accepted his apology if he'd made any. All he done was mumble something about cramped quarters. They was even more cramped when we set the table for the big feed, and it was my tough luck to have our guest park himself in the chair nearest the clothes closet, where my two bottles of Scotch had been put to bed. The fourth snifter finished the pint of rye and I said I'd get the other quart, but before I could stop her, Ella says:

"Let Mr. Ralston get it. It's right there by him."

So the next thing you know, James has found the good stuff and he comes out with both bottles of it.

"McAllister!" he says. "That's my favorite. If I'd knew you had that, I wouldn't of drank up all your rye."

"You haven't drank it all up," I says. "They's another bottle of it in there."

"It can stay there as long as we got this," he says, and helped himself to the corkscrew.

Well, amongst the knickknacks the gals had picked up at the delicatessen was a roast chicken and a bottle of olives, and at the time I thought Ralston was swallowing bones, stones and all. It wasn't till the next day that we found all these keepsakes on the floor, along with a couple dozen assorted cigarette butts.

Katie's chorus gal friend had told her how funny the guy was when he'd had just the right number of shots, but I'd counted eight and begin to get discouraged before he started talking.

"My mother could certainly cook a chicken," he says.

"Is your mother living?" Kate ast him.

"No," he says. "She was killed in a railroad wreck. I'll never forget when I had to go and identify her. You wouldn't believe a person could get that mangled! No," he says, "my family's all gone. I never seen my father. He was in the pest-house with smallpox when I was born and he died there. And my only sister died of jaundice. I can still —"

But Kate was scared we'd wake up the hotel, laughing, so she says: "Do you ever give imitations?"

"You mustn't make Mr. Ralston talk about himself," says Ella.

"Imitations of who?" said Ralston.

"Oh, other actors," said Katie.

"No," he says. "I leave it to the other actors to give imitations of me."

"I never seen none of them do it," says Kate.

"They all do it, but they don't advertise it," he says.

"Every comic in New York is using my stuff."

"Oh!" said Ella. "You mean they steal your idears."

"Can't you go after them for it?" ast Katie.

"You could charge them with petit larceny," I said.

"I wouldn't be mean," said Ralston. "But they ain't a comic on the stage to-day that I didn't give him every laugh he's got."

"You ain't only been on the stage three or four years," I says. "How did Hitchcock and Ed Wynn and them fellas get by before they seen you?"

"They wasn't getting by," he says. "I'm the baby that put them on their feet. Take Hitchy. Hitchy come to me last spring and says, 'Jim, I've ran out of stuff. Have you got any notions I could use?' So I says, 'Hitchy, you're welcome to anything I got.' So I give him a couple of idears and they're the only laughs in his troupe. And you take Wynn. He opened up with a troupe that looked like a flop and one day I seen him on Broadway, wearing a long pan, and I says, 'What's the matter, Eddie?' And he brightened up and says, 'Hello, there, Jim! You're just the boy I want to see.' So I says, 'Well, Eddie, I'm only too glad to do anything I can.' So he says, 'I got a flop on my hands unlest I can get a couple of idears, and you're the baby that can give them to me.' So I said, 'All right, Eddie.' And I give him a couple of notions to work on and they made his show. And look at Stone! And Errol! And Jolson and Tinney! Every one of them come to me at one time another, hollering for help. 'Jim, give me a couple of notions!' 'Jim, give me a couple of gags!' And not a one of them went away empty-handed."

"Did they pay you?" ast Ella.

Ralston smiled.

"I wouldn't take no actor's money," he says. "They're all brothers to me. They can have anything I got, and I can have anything they got, only they haven't got nothing."

Well, I can't tell you all he said, as I was asleep part of the time. But I do remember that he was the one that had give Bert Williams the notion of playing coon parts, and learnt Sarah Bernhardt to talk French.

Along about four o'clock, when they was less than a pint left in the second McAllister bottle, he defied all the theater managers in New York.

"I ain't going to monkey with them much longer!" he says. "I'll let you folks in on something that'll cause a sensation on Broadway. I'm going to quit the Follies!"

We was all speechless.

"That's the big secret!" he says. "I'm coming out as a star under my own management and in a troupe wrote and produced by myself!"

"When?" ast Kate.

"Just as soon as I decide who I'm going to let in as part owner," said Ralston. "I've worked for other guys long enough! Why should I be satisfied with \$800 a week when Ziegfeld's getting rich off me!"

"When did he cut you \$200?" I says. "You was getting \$1000 last time I seen you."

He didn't pay no attention.

"And why should I let some manager produce my play," he says, "and pay me maybe \$1,200 a week when I ought to be making six or seven thousand!"

"Are you working on your play now?" Kate ast him.

"It's done," he says. "I'm just trying to make up my mind who's the right party to let in on it. Whoever it is, I'll make him rich."



"I've got some money to invest," says Katie. "Suppose you tell us about the play."

"I'll give you the notion, if you'll keep it to yourself," says Ralston. "It's a serious play with a novelty idear that'll be a sensation. Suppose I go down to my suite and get the script and read it to you."

"Oh, if you would!" says Kate.

"It'll knock you dead!" he says.

And just the thought of it was fatal to the author. He got up from his chair, done a nose dive acrost the table and laid there with his head in the chili sauce.

I called up the clerk and had him send up the night bellhop with our guest's key. I and the boy acted as pall bearers and got him to his "suite," where we performed the last sad rites. Before I come away I noticed that the "suite" was a ringer for Ella's and mine — a dinky little room with a bath. The "study" was prettily furnished with coat hangers.

When I got back to my room Katie'd ducked and the Mrs. was asleep, so I didn't get a chance to talk to them till we was in the restaurant at noon. Then I ast Kate if she'd figured out just what number drink it was that had started him being comical.

"Now listen," she says: "I don't think that Abbott girl ever met him in her life. Anyway, she had him all wrong. We expected he'd do stunts, like she said, but he ain't that kind that shows off or acts smart. He's too much of a man for that. He's a bigger man than I thought."

"I and the bellhop remarked that same thing," I says.

"And you needn't make fun of him for getting faint," says Katie. "I called him up a wile ago to find out how he was and he apologized and said they must of been something in that second bottle of Scotch."

So I says:

"You tell him they was, but they ain't."

Well, it couldn't of been the Scotch or no other brew that ruined me. Or if it was, it worked mighty slow. I didn't even look at a drink for three days after the party in our room. But the third day I felt rotten, and that night I come down with a fever. Ella got scared and called a doctor and he said it was flu, and if I didn't watch my step it'd be something worse. He advised taking me to a hospital and I didn't have pep enough to say no.

So they took me and I was pretty sick for a couple of weeks — too sick for the Mrs. to give me the news. And it's a wonder I didn't have a relapse when she finally did.

"You'll probably yelp when you hear this," she says. "I ain't crazy about it myself, but it didn't do me no good to argue at first and it's too late for argument now. Well, to begin with, Sis is in love with Ralston."

"What of it!" I said. "She's going through the city directory and she's just got to the R's."

"No, it's the real thing this time," said the Mrs. "Wait till you hear the rest of it. She's going on the stage!"

"I've got nothing against that," I says. "She's pretty enough to get by in the Follies chorus, and if she can earn money that way, I'm for it."

"She ain't going into no chorus," said Ella. "Ralston's quit the Follies and she's going in his show."

"The one he wrote?" I ast.

"Yes," said the Mrs.

"And who's going to put it on?" I ast her.

"That's it," she says. "They're going to put it on themself, Ralston and Sis. With Sis's money. She sold her bonds, fifty thousand dollars' worth."

"But listen," I says. "Fifty thousand dollars! What's the name of the play, Ringling's Circus?"

"It won't cost all that," said Ella. "They figure it'll take less than ten thousand to get started. But she insisted on having the whole thing in a checking account, where she can get at it. If the show's a big success in New York they're going to have a company in Chicago and another on the road. And Ralston says her half of the profits in New York ought to run round \$5000 a week. But anyway, she's sure of \$200 a week salary for acting in it."

"Where did she get the idear she can act?" I says.

"She's always had it," said the Mrs., "and I think she made him promise to put her in the show before she agreed to back it. Though she says it's a wonderful investment! She won't be the leading woman, of course. But they's only two woman's parts and she's got one of them."

"Well," I said, "if she's going to play a sap and just acts normal, she'll be a sensation."

"I don't know what she'll be," says Ella. "All I know is that she's mad over Ralston and believes everything he says. And even if you hadn't of been sick we couldn't of stopped her."

So I ast what the play was like, but Ella couldn't tell me.

Ralston had read it out loud to she and Kate, but she couldn't judge from just hearing it that way. But Kate was tickled to death with it. And they'd already been rehearsing a week, but Sis hadn't let Ella see the rehearsals. She said it made her nervous.

"Ralston thinks the main trouble will be finding a theater," said the Mrs. "He says they's a shortage of them and the men that owns them won't want to let him have one on account of jealousy."

"Has the Follies flopped?" I ast her.

"No," she says, "but they've left town."

"They always do, this time of year," I said.

"That's what I thought," says the Mrs., "but Ralston says they'd intended to stay here all the year round, but when the news come out that he'd left, they didn't dast. He's certainly got faith in himself. He must have, to give up a \$600 a week salary. That's what he says he was really getting."

"You say Katie's in love," I says. "How about him?"

"I don't know and she don't know," says Ella. "He calls her dearie and everything and holds her hands, but when they're alone together, he won't talk nothing but business. Still, as I say, he calls her dearie."

"Actors calls every gal that," I says. "It's because they can't remember names."

Well, to make a short story out of it, they had another couple weeks' rehearsals that we wasn't allowed to see, and they finally got a theater — the Olney. They had to guarantee a \$10,000 business to get it. They didn't go to Atlantic City or nowheres for a tryout. They opened cold. And Ralston didn't tell nobody what kind of a show it was.

Of course he done what they generally always do on a first night. He sent out free passes to everybody that's got a dress suit, and they's enough of them in New York to pretty near fill up a theater. These invited guests is supposed to be for the performance wile it's going on. After it's through, they can go out and ride it all over the island.

Well, the rules wasn't exactly lived up to at "Bridget Sees a Ghost." On account of Ralston writing the play and starring in it, the gang thought it would be comical and they come prepared to laugh. It was comical all right, and they laughed. They didn't only laugh; they yelled. But they yelled in the wrong place.

The programme said it was "a Daring Drama in Three Acts."

The three acts was what made it daring. It took nerve to even have one. In the first place, this was two years after the armistice and the play was about the war, and I don't know which the public was most interested in by this time — the war or Judge Parker.

Act 1 was in July, 1917. Ralston played the part of Francis Shaw, a captain in the American army. He's been married a year, and when the curtain goes up, his wife's in their New York home, waiting for him to come in from camp on his weekly leave. She sets reading the war news in the evening paper, and she reads it out loud, like people always do when they're alone, waiting for somebody. Pretty soon in comes Bridget, the Irish maid — our own dear Katie. And I wished you could of heard her brogue. And seen her gestures. What she reminded me most like was a gal in a home talent minstrels giving an imitation of Lew Fields playing the part of the block system on the New York Central. Her first line was, "Ain't der captain home yed?" But I won't try and give you her dialect.

"No," says Mrs. Shaw. "He's late." So Katie says better late than never, and the wife says, yes, but she's got a feeling that some day it'll be never; something tells her that if he ever goes to France, he won't come back. So Bridget says, "You been reading the war news again and it always makes you sad." "I hate wars!" says Mrs. Shaw, and that line got one of the biggest laughs.

After this they was a couple of minutes when neither of them could think of nothing to add, and then the phone rung and Bridget answered it. It was Capt. Shaw, saying he'd be there pretty soon; so Bridget goes right back to the kitchen to finish getting dinner, but she ain't no sooner than left the stage when Capt. Shaw struts in. He must of called up from the public booth on his front porch.



The audience had a tough time recognizing him without his comic make-up, but when they did they gave him a good hand. Mrs. Shaw got up to greet him, but he brushed by her and came down to the footlights to bow. Then he turned and went back to his Mrs., saying "Maizie!" like this was the last place he expected to run across her. They kissed and then he asked her "Where is Bobbie, our dear little one?" — for fear she wouldn't know whose little one he meant. So she rung a bell and back came Bridget, and he says "Well, Bridget!" and Bridget says, "Well, it's the master!" This line was another riot. "Bring the little one, Bridget," says Mrs. Shaw, and the audience hollered again.

While Bridget was after the little one, the captain celebrated the reunion by walking round the room, looking at the pictures. Bridget brings the baby in and the captain uncovers its face and says, "Well, Bobbie!" Then he turns to his wife and says, "Let's see, Maizie. How old is he?" "Two weeks," says Maizie. "Two weeks!" says Captain Shaw, surprised. "Well," he says, "I hope by the time he's old enough to fight for the Stars and Stripes, they won't be no such a thing as war." So Mrs. Shaw says, "And I hope his father won't be called on to make the supreme sacrifice for him and we others that must stay home and wait. I sometimes think that in wartime, it's the women and children that suffers most. Take him back to his cozy cradle, Bridget. We mothers must be careful of our little ones. Who knows when the kiddies will be our only comfort!" So Bridget beat it out with the little one and I bet he hated to leave all the gayety.

"Well," says Shaw to his wife, "and what's the little woman been doing?"

"Just reading," she says, "reading the news of this horrible war. I don't never pick up the paper but what I think that some day I'll see your name amongst the dead."

"Well," says the captain bravely, "they's no danger wile I stay on U.S. soil. But only for you and the little one, I would welcome the call to go Over There and take my place in the battle line. The call will come soon, I believe, for they say France needs men." This rumor pretty near caused a riot in the audience and Ralston turned and give us all a dirty look.

Then Bridget come in again and said dinner was ready, and Shaw says, "It'll seem funny to set down wile I eat." Which was the first time I ever knew that army captains took their meals off the mantelpiece.

Wile the Shaws was out eating, their maid stayed in the living room, where she'd be out of their way. It seems that Ralston had wrote a swell speech for her to make in this spot, about what a tough thing war is, to come along and separate a happy young couple like the Shaws that hadn't only been married a year. But the speech started "This is terrible!" and when Bridget got that much of it out, some egg in the gallery hollered "You said a mouthful, kid!" and stopped the show.

The house finally quieted down, but Katie was dumb for the first time in her life. She couldn't say the line that was the cue for the phone to ring, and she had to go over and answer a silent call. It was for the captain, and him and his wife both come back on the stage.

"Maizie," he says, after he'd hung up, "it's came! That was my general! We sail for France in half an hour!"

"O husband!" says Maizie. "This is the end!"

"Nonsense!" says Shaw with a brave smile. "This war means death for only a small per cent of our men."

"And almost no captains," yells the guy in the gallery.

Shaw gets ready to go, but she tells him to wait till she puts on her wraps; she'll go down to the dock and see him off.

"No, darling," he says. "Our orders is secret. I can't give you the name of our ship or where we're sailing from."

So he goes and she flops on the couch w'ining because he wouldn't tell her whether his ship left from Times Square or Grand Central.

They rung the curtain down here to make you think six days has passed. When it goes up again, Maizie's setting on the couch, holding the little one. Pretty soon Bridget comes in with the evening paper.

"They's a big headline, mum," she says. "A troopship has been torpedoed."

Well, when she handed her the paper, I could see the big headline. It said, "Phillies Hit Grimes Hard." But Maizie may of had a bet on Brooklyn. Anyway, she begin trembling and finally fell over stiff. So Bridget picked up the paper and read it out loud:

"Amongst the men lost was Capt. F. Shaw of New York."

Down went the curtain again and the first act was over, and some jokesmith in the audience yelled "Author! Author!"

"He's sunk!" said the egg in the gallery.

Well, Maizie was the only one in the whole theater that thought Shaw was dead. The rest of us just wished it. Still you couldn't blame her much for getting a wrong idear, as it was Nov. 11, 1918 — over a year later — when the second act begins, and she hadn't heard from him in all that time. It wasn't never brought out why. Maybe he'd forgot her name or maybe it was Burleson's fault, like everything else.

The scene was the same old living room and Maizie was setting on the same old couch, but she was all dressed up like Elsie Ferguson. It comes out that she's expecting a gentleman friend, a Mr. Thornton, to dinner. She asks Bridget if she thinks it would be wrong of her to accept the guy the next time he proposed. He's ast her every evening for the last six months and she can't stall him much longer. So Bridget says it's all

right if she loves him, but Maizie don't know if she loves him or not, but he looks so much like her late relic that she can't hardly tell the difference and besides, she has got to either marry or go to work, or her and the little one will starve. They's a knock at the door and Thornton comes in. Him and the absent captain looks as much alike as two brothers, yours and mine. Bridget ducks and Thornton proposes. Maizie says, "Before I answer, I must tell you a secret. Captain Shaw didn't leave me all alone. I have a little one, a boy." "Oh, I love kiddies," says Thornton. "Can I see him?" So she says it's seven o'clock and the little one's supposed to of been put to bed, but she has Bridget go get him.

The little one's entrance was the sensation of this act. In Act 1 he was just three or four towels, but now Bridget can't even carry him acrost the stage, and when she put him on his feet, he comes up pretty near to her shoulder. And when Thornton ast him would he like to have a new papa, he says, "Yes, because my other papa's never coming back."

Well, they say a woman can't keep a secret, but if Thornton had been nosing round for six months and didn't know till now that they was a spanker like Bobbie in the family circle, I wouldn't hardly call Maizie the town gossip.

After the baby'd went back to read himself to sleep and Mrs. Shaw had yessed her new admirer, Bridget dashed in yelling that the armistice was signed and held up the evening paper for Maizie and Thornton to see. The great news was announced in code. It said: "Phillies Hit Grimes Hard." And it seemed kind of silly to not come right out and say "Armistice Signed!" Because as I recall, even we saps out here in South Bend had knew it since three o'clock that morning.

The last act was in the same place, on Christmas Eve, 1918.

Maizie and her second husband had just finished doing up

presents for the little one. We couldn't see the presents, but I suppose they was giving him a cocktail shaker and a shaving set. Though when he come on the stage you could see he hadn't aged much since Act 2. He hadn't even begin to get bald.

Thornton and the Mrs. went off somewheres and left the kid alone, but all of a sudden the front door opened and in come old Cap Shaw, on crutches. He seen the kid and called to him. "Who are you?" says the little one. "I'm Santa Claus," says the Cap, "and I've broughten you a papa for Christmas." "I don't want no papa," says Bobbie. "I've just got a new one." Then Bridget popped in and seen "the master" and hollered, "A ghost!" So he got her calmed down and she tells him what's came off. "It was in the paper that Capt. F. Shaw of New York was lost," she says. "It must of been another Capt. F. Shaw!" he says.

"It's an odd name," hollered the guy in the gallery.

The Captain thinks it all over and decides it's his move. He makes Bridget promise to never tell that she seen him and he says good-by to she and the kid and goes out into the night.

Maizie comes in, saying she heard a noise and what was it? Was somebody here? "Just the boy with the evening paper," says Bridget. And the cat's got Bobbie's tongue. And Maizie don't even ask for the paper. She probably figured to herself it was the old story; that Grimes was still getting his bumps.

Well, I wished you could of read what the papers wrote up about the show. One of them said that Bridget seen a ghost at the Olney theater last night and if anybody else wanted to see it, they better go quick because it wouldn't be walking after this week. Not even on crutches. The mildest thing they said about Ralston was that he was even funnier than when he was in the Follies and tried to be. And they said the part of Bridget was played by a young actress that they hoped would



make a name for herself, because Ralston had probably called her all he could think of.

We waited at the stage door that night and when Kate come out, she was crying. Ralston had canned her from the show.

"That's nothing to cry about," I says. "You're lucky! It's just like as if a conductor had put you off a train a couple of minutes before a big smash-up."

The programme had been to all go somewheres for supper and celebrate the play's success. But all Katie wanted now was to get in a taxi and go home and hide.

On the way, I ast her how much she was in so far.

"Just ten thousand," she says.

"Ten thousand!" I said. "Why, they was only one piece of scenery and that looked like they'd bought it secondhand from the choir boys' minstrels. They couldn't of spent one thousand, let alone ten."

"We had to pay the theater a week's rent in advance," she says. "And Jimmy give five thousand to a man for the idear."

"The idear for what?" I ast.

"The idear for the play," she said.

"That stops me!" I says. "This baby furnishes idears for all the good actors in the world, but when he wants one for himself, he goes out and pays \$5000 for it. And if he got a bargain, you're Mrs. Fiske."

"Who sold him the idear?" ast Ella.

"He wouldn't tell me," says Kate.

"Ponzi," I said.

Ralston called Kate up the next noon and made a date with her at the theater. He said that he was sorry he'd been rough. Before she went I ast her to give me a check for the forty thousand she had left so's I could buy back some of her bonds.

"I haven't got only \$25,000," she says. "I advanced Jimmy

fifteen thousand for his own account, so's he wouldn't have to bother me every time they was bills to meet."

So I said: "Listen: I'll go see him with you and if he don't come clean with that money, I'll knock him deader'n his play."

"Thank you!" she says. "I'll tend to my own affairs alone."

She come back late in the afternoon, all smiles.

"Everything's all right," she said. "I give him his choice of letting me be in the play or giving me my money."

"And which did he choose?" I ast her.

"Neither one," she says. "We're going to get married."

"Bridget" went into the ashcan Saturday night and the wedding come off Monday. Monday night they left for Boston, where the Follies was playing. Kate told us they'd took Ralston back at the same salary he was getting before.

"How much is that?" I ast her.

"Four hundred a week," she says.

Well, two or three days after they'd left, I got up my nerve and says to the Mrs.:

"Do you remember what we moved to the Big Town for? We done it to see Life and get Katie a husband. Well, we got her a kind of a husband and I'll tell the world we seen Life. How about moseying back to South Bend?"

"But we haven't no home there now."

"Nor we ain't had none since we left there," I says. "I'm going down and see what's the first day we can get a couple of lowers."

"Get uppers if it's quicker," says the Mrs.

So here we are, really enjoying ourselves for the first time in pretty near two years. And Katie's in New York, enjoying herself, too, I suppose. She ought to be, married to a comedian. It must be such fun to just set and listen to him talk.

## THE DAUGHTERS OF THE LATE COLONEL<sup>1</sup>

By KATHERINE MANSFIELD

### I

THE week after was one of the busiest weeks of their lives. Even when they went to bed it was only their bodies that lay down and rested; their minds went on, thinking things out, talking things over, wondering, deciding, trying to remember where . . .

Constantia lay like a statue, her hands by her sides, her feet just overlapping each other, the sheet up to her chin. She stared at the ceiling.

"Do you think father would mind if we gave his top-hat to the porter?"

"The porter?" snapped Josephine. "Why ever the porter? What a very extraordinary idea!"

"Because," said Constantia slowly, "he must often have to go to funerals. And I noticed at — at the cemetery that he only had a bowler." She paused. "I thought then how very much he'd appreciate a top-hat. We ought to give him a present, too. He was always very nice to father."

"But," cried Josephine, flouncing on her pillow and staring across the dark at Constantia, "father's head!" And suddenly, for one awful moment, she nearly giggled. Not, of course, that she felt in the least like giggling. It must have been habit. Years ago, when they had stayed awake at night talking, their beds had simply heaved. And now the porter's head, disap-

<sup>1</sup> From *The Garden Party*, by Katherine Mansfield. Reprinted by permission of, and by special arrangement with, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., authorized publishers, copyright, 1922.

pearing, popped out, like a candle, under father's hat. . . . The giggle mounted, mounted; she clenched her hands; she fought it down; she frowned fiercely at the dark and said "Remember" terribly sternly.

"We can decide to-morrow," she sighed.

Constantia had noticed nothing; she sighed.

"Do you think we ought to have our dressing-gowns dyed as well?"

"Black?" almost shrieked Josephine.

"Well, what else?" said Constantia. "I was thinking — it doesn't seem quite sincere, in a way, to wear black out of doors and when we're fully dressed, and then when we're at home —"

"But nobody sees us," said Josephine. She gave the bed-clothes such a twitch that both her feet became uncovered, and she had to creep up the pillows to get them well under again.

"Kate does," said Constantia. "And the postman very well might."

Josephine thought of her dark-red slippers, which matched her dressing-gown, and of Constantia's favourite indefinite green ones which went with hers. Black! Two black dressing-gowns and two pairs of black woolly slippers, creeping off to the bathroom like black cats.

"I don't think it's absolutely necessary," said she.

Silence. Then Constantia said, "We shall have to post the papers with the notice in them to-morrow to catch the Ceylon mail. . . . How many letters have we had up till now?"

"Twenty-three."

Josephine had replied to them all, and twenty-three times when she came to "We miss our dear father so much" she had broken down and had to use her handkerchief, and on some of them even to soak up a very light-blue tear with an edge of blotting-paper. Strange! She couldn't have put it on —

but twenty-three times. Even now, though, when she said over to herself sadly, "We miss our dear father *so* much," she could have cried if she'd wanted to.

"Have you got enough stamps?" came from Constantia.

"Oh, how can I tell?" said Josephine crossly. "What's the good of asking me that now?"

"I was just wondering," said Constantia mildly.

Silence again. There came a little rustle, a scurry, a hop.

"A mouse," said Constantia.

"It can't be a mouse because there aren't any crumbs," said Josephine.

"But it doesn't know there aren't," said Constantia.

A spasm of pity squeezed her heart. Poor little thing! She wished she'd left a tiny piece of biscuit on the dressing-table. It was awful to think of it not finding anything. What would it do?

"I can't think how they manage to live at all," she said slowly.

"Who?" demanded Josephine.

And Constantia said more loudly than she meant to, "Mice."

Josephine was furious. "Oh, what nonsense, Con!" she said. "What have mice got to do with it? You're asleep."

"I don't think I am," said Constantia. She shut her eyes to make sure. She was.

Josephine arched her spine, pulled up her knees, folded her arms so that her fists came under her ears, and pressed her cheek hard against the pillow.

## II

Another thing which complicated matters was they had Nurse Andrews staying on with them that week. It was their



own fault; they had asked her. It was Josephine's idea. On the morning — well, on the last morning, when the doctor had gone, Josephine had said to Constantia, "Don't you think it would be rather nice if we asked Nurse Andrews to stay on for a week as our guest?"

"Very nice," said Constantia.

"I thought," went on Josephine quickly, "I should just say this afternoon, after I've paid her, 'My sister and I would be very pleased, after all you've done for us, Nurse Andrews, if you would stay on for a week as our guest.' I'd have to put that in about being our guest in case —"

"Oh, but she could hardly expect to be paid!" cried Constantia.

"One never knows," said Josephine sagely.

Nurse Andrews had, of course, jumped at the idea. But it was a bother. It meant they had to have regular sit-down meals at the proper times, whereas if they'd been alone they could just have asked Kate if she wouldn't have minded bringing them a tray wherever they were. And meal-times now that the strain was over were rather a trial.

Nurse Andrews was simply fearful about butter. Really they couldn't help feeling that about butter, at least, she took advantage of their kindness. And she had that maddening habit of asking for just an inch more bread to finish what she had on her plate, and then, at the last mouthful, absent-mindedly — of course it wasn't absent-mindedly — taking another helping. Josephine got very red when this happened, and she fastened her small, bead-like eyes on the tablecloth as if she saw a minute strange insect creeping through the web of it. But Constantia's long, pale face lengthened and set, and she gazed away — away — far over the desert, to where that line of camels unwound like a thread of wool. . . .

"When I was with Lady Tukes," said Nurse Andrews, "she had such a dainty little contrayvance for the buttah. It was a silvah Cupid balanced on the — on the bordah of a glass dish, holding a tayny fork. And when you wanted some buttah you simply pressed his foot and he bent down and speared you a piece. It was quite a gayme."

Josephine could hardly bear that. But "I think those things are very extravagant" was all she said.

"But whey?" asked Nurse Andrews, beaming through her eyeglasses. "No one, surely, would take more buttah than one wanted — would one?"

"Ring, Con," cried Josephine. She couldn't trust herself to reply.

And proud young Kate, the enchanted princess, came in to see what the old tabbies wanted now. She snatched away their plates of mock something or other and slapped down a white, terrified blancmange.

"Jam, please, Kate," said Josephine kindly.

Kate knelt and burst open the sideboard, lifted the lid of the jam-pot, saw it was empty, put it on the table, and stalked off.

"I'm afraid," said Nurse Andrews a moment later, "there isn't any."

"Oh, what a bother!" said Josephine. She bit her lip. "What had we better do?"

Constantia looked dubious. "We can't disturb Kate again," she said softly.

Nurse Andrews waited, smiling at them both. Her eyes wandered, spying at everything behind her eyeglasses. Constantia in despair went back to her camels. Josephine frowned heavily — concentrated. If it hadn't been for this idiotic woman she and Con would, of course, have eaten their blancmange without. Suddenly the idea came.

"I know," she said. "Marmalade. There's some marmalade in the sideboard. Get it, Con."

"I hope," laughed Nurse Andrews, and her laugh was like a spoon tinkling against a medicine-glass — "I hope it's not very bittah marmalayde."

## III

But, after all, it was not long now, and then she'd be gone for good. And there was no getting over the fact that she had been very kind to father. She had nursed him day and night at the end. Indeed, both Constantia and Josephine felt privately she had rather overdone the not leaving him at the very last. For when they had gone in to say good-bye Nurse Andrews had sat beside his bed the whole time, holding his wrist and pretending to look at her watch. It couldn't have been necessary. It was so tactless, too. Supposing father had wanted to say something — something private to them. Not that he had. Oh, far from it! He lay there, purple, a dark, angry purple in the face, and never even looked at them when they came in. Then, as they were standing there, wondering what to do, he had suddenly opened one eye. Oh, what a difference it would have made, what a difference to their memory of him, how much easier to tell people about it, if he had only opened both! But no — one eye only. It glared at them a moment and then . . . went out.

## IV

It had made it very awkward for them when Mr. Farolles, of St. John's, called the same afternoon.

"The end was quite peaceful, I trust?" were the first words he said as he glided towards them through the dark drawing-room.

"Quite," said Josephine faintly. They both hung their

heads. Both of them felt certain that eye wasn't at all a peaceful eye.

"Won't you sit down?" said Josephine.

"Thank you, Miss Pinner," said Mr. Farolles gratefully. He folded his coat-tails and began to lower himself into father's arm-chair, but just as he touched it he almost sprang up and slid into the next chair instead.

He coughed. Josephine clasped her hands; Constantia looked vague.

"I want you to feel, Miss Pinner," said Mr. Farolles, "and you, Miss Constantia, that I'm trying to be helpful. I want to be helpful to you both, if you will let me. These are the times," said Mr. Farolles, very simply and earnestly, "when God means us to be helpful to one another."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Farolles," said Josephine and Constantia.

"Not at all," said Mr. Farolles gently. He drew his kid gloves through his fingers and leaned forward. "And if either of you would like a little Communion, either or both of you, here *and* now, you have only to tell me. A little Communion is often very help — a great comfort," he added tenderly.

But the idea of a little Communion terrified them. What! In the drawing-room by themselves — with no — no altar or anything! The piano would be much too high, thought Constantia, and Mr. Farolles could not possibly lean over it with the chalice. And Kate would be sure to come bursting in and interrupt them, thought Josephine. And supposing the bell rang in the middle? It might be somebody important — about their mourning. Would they get up reverently and go out, or would they have to wait . . . in torture?

"Perhaps you will send round a note by your good Kate if you would care for it later," said Mr. Farolles.

"Oh yes, thank you very much!" they both said.

Mr. Farolles got up and took his black straw hat from the round table.

"And about the funeral," he said softly. "I may arrange that — as your dear father's old friend and yours, Miss Pinner — and Miss Constantia?"

Josephine and Constantia got up too.

"I should like it to be quite simple," said Josephine firmly, "and not too expensive. At the same time, I should like —"

"A good one that will last," thought dreamy Constantia, as if Josephine were buying a nightgown. But of course Josephine didn't say that. "One suitable to our father's position." She was very nervous.

"I'll run round to our good friend Mr. Knight," said Mr. Farolles soothingly. "I will ask him to come and see you. I am sure you will find him very helpful indeed."

## V

Well, at any rate, all that part of it was over, though neither of them could possibly believe that father was never coming back. Josephine had had a moment of absolute terror at the cemetery, while the coffin was lowered, to think that she and Constantia had done this thing without asking his permission. What would father say when he found out? For he was bound to find out sooner or later. He always did. "Buried. You two girls had me *buried*!" She heard his stick thumping. Oh, what would they say? What possible excuse could they make? It sounded such an appallingly heartless thing to do. Such a wicked advantage to take of a person because he happened to be helpless at the moment. The other people seemed to treat it all as a matter of course. They were strangers; they couldn't be expected to understand that father was the very last person



for such a thing to happen to. No, the entire blame for it all would fall on her and Constantia. And the expense, she thought, stepping into the tight-buttoned cab. When she had to show him the bills. What would he say then?

She heard him absolutely roaring, "And do you expect me to pay for this gimcrack excursion of yours?"

"Oh," groaned poor Josephine aloud, "we shouldn't have done it, Con!"

And Constantia, pale as a lemon in all that blackness, said in a frightened whisper, "Done what, Jug?"

"Let them bu-bury father like that," said Josephine, breaking down and crying into her new, queer-smelling mourning handkerchief.

"But what else could we have done?" asked Constantia wonderingly. "We couldn't have kept him, Jug—we couldn't have kept him unburied. At any rate, not in a flat that size."

Josephine blew her nose; the cab was dreadfully stuffy.

"I don't know," she said forlornly. "It is all so dreadful. I feel we ought to have tried to, just for a time at least. To make perfectly sure. One thing's certain" — and her tears sprang out again — "father will never forgive us for this — never!"

## VI

Father would never forgive them. That was what they felt more than ever when, two mornings later, they went into his room to go through his things. They had discussed it quite calmly. It was even down on Josephine's list of things to be done. *Go through father's things and settle about them.* But that was a very different matter from saying after breakfast:

"Well, are you ready, Con?"

"Yes, Jug — when you are."

"Then I think we'd better get it over."

It was dark in the hall. It had been a rule for years never to disturb father in the morning, whatever happened. And now they were going to open the door without knocking even. . . . Constantia's eyes were enormous at the idea; Josephine felt weak in the knees.

"You — you go first," she gasped, pushing Constantia.

But Constantia said, as she always had said on those occasions, "No, Jug, that's not fair. You're eldest."

Josephine was just going to say — what at other times she wouldn't have owned to for the world — what she kept for her very last weapon, "But you're tallest," when they noticed that the kitchen door was open, and there stood Kate. . . .

"Very stiff," said Josephine, grasping the door-handle and doing her best to turn it. As if anything ever deceived Kate!

It couldn't be helped. That girl was . . . Then the door was shut behind them, but — but they weren't in father's room at all. They might have suddenly walked through the wall by mistake into a different flat altogether. Was the door just behind them? They were too frightened to look. Josephine knew that if it was it was holding itself tight shut; Constantia felt that, like the doors in dreams, it hadn't any handle at all. It was the coldness which made it so awful. Or the whiteness — which? Everything was covered. The blinds were down, a cloth hung over the mirror, a sheet hid the bed; a huge fan of white paper filled the fireplace. Constantia timidly put out her hand; she almost expected a snowflake to fall. Josephine felt a queer tingling in her nose, as if her nose was freezing. Then a cab klop-klopped over the cobbles below, and the quiet seemed to shake into little pieces.

"I had better pull up a blind," said Josephine bravely.

"Yes, it might be a good idea," whispered Constantia.

They only gave the blind a touch, but it flew up and the cord

flew after, rolling round the blind-stick, and the little tassel tapped as if trying to get free. That was too much for Constantia.

"Don't you think — don't you think we might put it off for another day?" she whispered.

"Why?" snapped Josephine, feeling, as usual, much better now that she knew for certain that Constantia was terrified. "It's got to be done. But I do wish you wouldn't whisper, Con."

"I didn't know I was whispering," whispered Constantia.

"And why do you keep on staring at the bed?" said Josephine, raising her voice almost defiantly. "There's nothing *on* the bed."

"Oh, Jug, don't say so!" said poor Connie. "At any rate, not so loudly."

Josephine felt herself that she had gone too far. She took a wide swerve over to the chest of drawers, put out her hand, but quickly drew it back again.

"Connie!" she gasped, and she wheeled round and leaned with her back against the chest of drawers.

"Oh, Jug — what?"

Josephine could only glare. She had the most extraordinary feeling that she had just escaped something simply awful. But how could she explain to Constantia that father was in the chest of drawers? He was in the top drawer with his handkerchiefs and neckties, or in the next with his shirts and pyjamas, or in the lowest of all with his suits. He was watching there, hidden away — just behind the door-handle — ready to spring.

She pulled a funny old-fashioned face at Constantia, just as she used to in the old days when she was going to cry.

"I can't open," she nearly wailed.

"No, don't, Jug," whispered Constantia earnestly. "It's

much better not to. Don't let's open anything. At any rate, not for a long time."

"But — but it seems so weak," said Josephine, breaking down.

"But why not be weak for once, Jug?" argued Constantia, whispering quite fiercely. "If it is weak." And her pale stare flew from the locked writing-table — so safe — to the huge glittering wardrobe, and she began to breathe in a queer, panting way. "Why shouldn't we be weak for once in our lives, Jug? It's quite excusable. Let's be weak — be weak, Jug. It's much nicer to be weak than to be strong."

And then she did one of those amazingly bold things that she'd done about twice before in their lives; she marched over to the wardrobe, turned the key, and took it out of the lock. Took it out of the lock and held it up to Josephine, showing Josephine by her extraordinary smile that she knew what she'd done, she'd risked deliberately father being in there among his overcoats.

If the huge wardrobe had lurched forward, had crashed down on Constantia, Josephine wouldn't have been surprised. On the contrary, she would have thought it the only suitable thing to happen. But nothing happened. Only the room seemed quieter than ever, and bigger flakes of cold air fell on Josephine's shoulders and knees. She began to shiver.

"Come, Jug," said Constantia, still with that awful callous smile, and Josephine followed just as she had that last time, when Constantia had pushed Benny into the round pond.

## VII

But the strain told on them when they were back in the dining-room. They sat down, very shaky, and looked at each other.

"I don't feel I can settle to anything," said Josephine, "until

I've had something. Do you think we could ask Kate for two cups of hot water?"

"I really don't see why we shouldn't," said Constantia carefully. She was quite normal again. "I won't ring. I'll go to the kitchen door and ask her."

"Yes, do," said Josephine, sinking down into a chair. "Tell her, just two cups, Con, nothing else — on a tray."

"She needn't even put the jug on, need she?" said Constantia, as though Kate might very well complain if the jug had been there.

"Oh no, certainly not! The jug's not at all necessary. She can pour it direct out of the kettle," cried Josephine, feeling that would be a labour-saving indeed.

Their cold lips quivered at the greenish brims. Josephine curved her small red hands round the cup; Constantia sat up and blew on the wavy stream, making it flutter from one side to the other.

"Speaking of Benny," said Josephine.

And though Benny hadn't been mentioned Constantia immediately looked as though he had.

"He'll expect us to send him something of father's, of course. But it's so difficult to know what to send to Ceylon."

"You mean things get unstuck so on the voyage," murmured Constantia.

"No, lost," said Josephine sharply. "You know there's no post. Only runners."

Both paused to watch a black man in white linen drawers running through the pale fields for dear life, with a large brown-paper parcel in his hands. Josephine's black man was tiny; he scurried along glistening like an ant. But there was something blind and tireless about Constantia's tall, thin fellow, which made him, she decided, a very unpleasant person indeed. . . .



On the veranda, dressed all in white and wearing a cork helmet, stood Benny. His right hand shook up and down, as father's did when he was impatient. And behind him, not in the least interested, sat Hilda, the unknown sister-in-law. She swung in a cane rocker and flicked over the leaves of the *Tatler*.

"I think his watch would be the most suitable present," said Josephine.

Constantia looked up; she seemed surprised.

"Oh, would you trust a gold watch to a native?"

"But of course I'd disguise it," said Josephine. "No one would know it was a watch." She liked the idea of having to make a parcel such a curious shape that no one could possibly guess what it was. She even thought for a moment of hiding the watch in a narrow cardboard corset-box that she'd kept by her for a long time, waiting for it to come in for something. It was such beautiful firm cardboard. But, no, it wouldn't be appropriate for this occasion. It had lettering on it: *Medium Women's 28. Extra Firm Busks*. It would be almost too much of a surprise for Benny to open that and find father's watch inside.

"And of course it isn't as though it would be going — ticking, I mean," said Constantia, who was still thinking of the native love of jewellery. "At least," she added, "it would be very strange if after all that time it was."

#### VIII

Josephine made no reply. She had flown off on one of her tangents. She had suddenly thought of Cyril. Wasn't it more usual for the only grandson to have the watch? And then dear Cyril was so appreciative, and a gold watch meant so much to a young man. Benny, in all probability, had quite got out of the habit of watches; men so seldom wore waistcoats in those

hot climates. Whereas Cyril in London wore them from year's end to year's end. And it would be so nice for her and Constantia, when he came to tea, to know it was there. "I see you've got on grandfather's watch, Cyril." It would be somehow so satisfactory.

Dear boy! What a blow his sweet, sympathetic little note had been! Of course they quite understood; but it was most unfortunate.

"It would have been such a point, having him," said Josephine.

"And he would have enjoyed it so," said Constantia, not thinking what she was saying.

However, as soon as he got back he was coming to tea with his aunties. Cyril to tea was one of their rare treats.

"Now, Cyril, you mustn't be frightened of our cakes. Your Auntie Con and I bought them at Buszard's this morning. We know what a man's appetite is. So don't be ashamed of making a good tea."

Josephine cut recklessly into the rich dark cake that stood for her winter gloves or the soling and heeling of Constantia's only respectable shoes. But Cyril was most unmanlike in appetite.

"I say, Aunt Josephine, I simply can't. I've only just had lunch, you know."

"Oh, Cyril, that can't be true! It's after four," cried Josephine. Constantia sat with her knife poised over the chocolate-roll.

"It is, all the same," said Cyril. "I had to meet a man at Victoria, and he kept me hanging about till . . . there was only time to get lunch and to come on here. And he gave me — phew" — Cyril put his hand to his forehead — "a terrific blow-out," he said.

It was disappointing — to-day of all days. But still he couldn't be expected to know.

"But you'll have a meringue, won't you, Cyril?" said Aunt Josephine. "These meringues were bought specially for you. Your dear father was so fond of them. We were sure you are, too."

"I *am*, Aunt Josephine," cried Cyril ardently. "Do you mind if I take half to begin with?"

"Not at all, dear boy; but we mustn't let you off with that."

"Is your dear father still so fond of meringues?" asked Auntie Con gently. She winced faintly as she broke through the shell of hers.

"Well, I don't quite know, Auntie Con," said Cyril breezily. At that they both looked up.

"Don't know?" almost snapped Josephine. "Don't know a thing like that about your own father, Cyril?"

"Surely," said Auntie Con softly.

Cyril tried to laugh it off. "Oh, well," he said, "it's such a long time since —" He faltered. He stopped. Their faces were too much for him.

"Even so," said Josephine.

And Auntie Con looked.

Cyril put down his teacup. "Wait a bit," he cried. "Wait a bit, Aunt Josephine. What am I thinking of?"

He looked up. They were beginning to brighten. Cyril slapped his knee.

"Of course," he said, "it was meringues. How could I have forgotten? Yes, Aunt Josephine, you're perfectly right. Father's most frightfully keen on meringues."

They didn't only beam. Aunt Josephine went scarlet with pleasure; Auntie Con gave a deep, deep sigh.

"And now, Cyril, you must come and see father," said Josephine. "He knows you were coming to-day."

"Right," said Cyril, very firmly and heartily. He got up from his chair; suddenly he glanced at the clock.

"I say, Auntie Con, isn't your clock a bit slow? I've got to meet a man at — at Paddington just after five. I'm afraid I shan't be able to stay very long with grandfather."

"Oh, he won't expect you to stay *very* long!" said Aunt Josephine.

Constantia was still gazing at the clock. She couldn't make up her mind if it was fast or slow. It was one or the other, she felt almost certain of that. At any rate, it had been.

Cyril still lingered. "Aren't you coming along, Auntie Con?"

"Of course," said Josephine, "we shall all go. Come on, Con."

## IX

They knocked at the door, and Cyril followed his aunts into grandfather's hot, sweetish room.

"Come on," said Grandfather Pinner. "Don't hang about. What is it? What've you been up to?"

He was sitting in front of a roaring fire, clasping his stick. He had a thick rug over his knees. On his lap there lay a beautiful pale yellow silk handkerchief.

"It's Cyril, father," said Josephine shyly. And she took Cyril's hand and led him forward.

"Good afternoon, grandfather," said Cyril, trying to take his hand out of Aunt Josephine's. Grandfather Pinner shot his eyes at Cyril in the way he was famous for. Where was Auntie Con? She stood on the other side of Aunt Josephine; her long arms hung down in front of her; her hands were clasped. She never took her eyes off grandfather.

"Well," said Grandfather Pinner, beginning to thump, "what have you got to tell me?"

What had he, what had he got to tell him? Cyril felt himself smiling like a perfect imbecile. The room was stifling, too.

But Aunt Josephine came to his rescue. She cried brightly, "Cyril says his father is still very fond of meringues, father dear."

"Eh?" said Grandfather Pinner, curving his hand like a purple meringue-shell over one ear.

Josephine repeated, "Cyril says his father is still very fond of meringues."

"Can't hear," said old Colonel Pinner. And he waved Josephine away with his stick, then pointed with his stick to Cyril. "Tell me what she's trying to say," he said.

(My God!) "Must I?" said Cyril, blushing and staring at Aunt Josephine.

"Do, dear," she smiled. "It will please him so much."

"Come on, out with it!" cried Colonel Pinner testily, beginning to thump again.

And Cyril leaned forward and yelled, "Father's still very fond of meringues."

At that Grandfather Pinner jumped as though he had been shot.

"Don't shout!" he cried. "What's the matter with the boy? *Meringues!* What about 'em?"

"Oh, Aunt Josephine, must we go on?" groaned Cyril desperately.

"It's quite all right, dear boy," said Aunt Josephine, as though he and she were at the dentist's together. "He'll understand in a minute." And she whispered to Cyril, "He's getting a bit deaf, you know." Then she leaned forward and really bawled at Grandfather Pinner, "Cyril only wanted to



tell you, father dear, that *his* father is still very fond of meringues."

Colonel Pinner heard that time, heard and brooded, looking Cyril up and down.

"What an esstrordinary thing!" said old Grandfather Pinner. "What an esstrordinary thing to come all this way here to tell me!"

And Cyril felt it *was*.

"Yes, I shall send Cyril the watch," said Josephine.

"That would be very nice," said Constantia. "I seem to remember last time he came there was some little trouble about the time."

## X

They were interrupted by Kate bursting through the door in her usual fashion, as though she had discovered some secret panel in the wall.

"Fried or boiled?" asked the bold voice.

Fried or boiled? Josephine and Constantia were quite bewildered for the moment. They could hardly take it in.

"Fried or boiled what, Kate?" asked Josephine, trying to begin to concentrate.

Kate gave a loud sniff. "Fish."

"Well, why didn't you say so immediately?" Josephine reproached her gently. "How could you expect us to understand, Kate? There are a great many things in this world, you know, which are fried or boiled." And after such a display of courage she said quite brightly to Constantia, "Which do you prefer, Con?"

"I think it might be nice to have it fried," said Constantia. "On the other hand, of course boiled fish is very nice. I think

I prefer both equally well . . . Unless you . . . In that case —”

“I shall fry it,” said Kate, and she bounced back, leaving their door open and slamming the door of her kitchen.

Josephine gazed at Constantia; she raised her pale eyebrows until they rippled away into her pale hair. She got up. She said in a very lofty, imposing way, “Do you mind following me into the drawing-room, Constantia? I’ve something of great importance to discuss with you.”

For it was always to the drawing-room they retired when they wanted to talk over Kate.

Josephine closed the door meaningly. “Sit down, Constantia,” she said, still very grand. She might have been receiving Constantia for the first time. And Con looked round vaguely for a chair, as though she felt indeed quite a stranger.

“Now the question is,” said Josephine, bending forward, “whether we shall keep her or not.”

“That is the question,” agreed Constantia.

“And this time,” said Josephine firmly, “we must come to a definite decision.”

Constantia looked for a moment as though she might begin going over all the other times, but she pulled herself together and said, “Yes, Jug.”

“You see, Con,” explained Josephine, “everything is so changed now.” Constantia looked up quickly. “I mean,” went on Josephine, “we’re not dependent on Kate as we were.” And she blushed faintly. “There’s not father to cook for.”

“That is perfectly true,” agreed Constantia. “Father certainly doesn’t want any cooking now, whatever else —”

Josephine broke in sharply, “You’re not sleepy, are you, Con?”

“Sleepy, Jug?” Constantia was wide-eyed.

“Well, concentrate more,” said Josephine sharply, and she

returned to the subject. "What it comes to is, if we did" — and this she barely breathed, glancing at the door — "give Kate notice" — she raised her voice again — "we could manage our own food."

"Why not?" cried Constantia. She couldn't help smiling. The idea was so exciting. She clasped her hands. "What should we live on, Jug?"

"Oh, eggs in various forms!" said Jug, lofty again. "And, besides, there are all the cooked foods."

"But I've always heard," said Constantia, "they are considered so very expensive."

"Not if one buys them in moderation," said Josephine. But she tore herself away from this fascinating bypath and dragged Constantia after her.

"What we've got to decide now, however, is whether we really do trust Kate or not."

Constantia leaned back. Her flat little laugh flew from her lips.

"Isn't it curious, Jug," said she, "that just on this one subject I've never been able to quite make up my mind?"

## XI

She never had. The whole difficulty was to prove anything. How did one prove things, how could one? Suppose Kate had stood in front of her and deliberately made a face. Mightn't she very well have been in pain? Wasn't it impossible, at any rate, to ask Kate if she was making a face at her? If Kate answered "No" — and of course she would say "No" — what a position! How undignified! Then again Constantia suspected, she was almost certain that Kate went to her chest of drawers when she and Josephine were out, not to take things but to spy. Many times she had come back to find her

amethyst cross in the most unlikely places, under her lace ties or on top of her evening Bertha. More than once she had laid a trap for Kate. She had arranged things in a special order and then called Josephine to witness.

"You see, Jug?"

"Quite, Con."

"Now we shall be able to tell."

But, oh dear, when she did go to look, she was as far off from a proof as ever! If anything was displaced, it might so very well have happened as she closed the drawer; a jolt might have done it so easily.

"You come, Jug, and decide. I really can't. It's too difficult."

But after a pause and a long glare Josephine would sigh, "Now you've put the doubt into my mind, Con, I'm sure I can't tell myself."

"Well, we can't postpone it again," said Josephine. "If we postpone it this time —"

## XII

But at that moment in the street below a barrel-organ struck up. Josephine and Constantia sprang to their feet together.

"Run, Con," said Josephine. "Run quickly. There's sixpence on the —"

Then they remembered. It didn't matter. They would never have to stop the organ-grinder again. Never again would she and Constantia be told to make that monkey take his noise somewhere else. Never would sound that loud, strange bellow when father thought they were not hurrying enough. The organ-grinder might play there all day and the stick would not thump.

*It never will thump again,  
It never will thump again,*

played the barrel-organ.

What was Constantia thinking? She had such a strange smile; she looked different. She couldn't be going to cry.

"Jug, Jug," said Constantia softly, pressing her hands together. "Do you know what day it is? It's Saturday. It's a week to-day, a whole week."

*A week since father died,  
A week since father died,*

cried the barrel-organ. And Josephine, too, forgot to be practical and sensible; she smiled faintly, strangely. On the Indian carpet there fell a square of sunlight, pale red; it came and went and came — and stayed, deepened — until it shone almost golden.

"The sun's out," said Josephine, as though it really mattered.

A perfect fountain of bubbling notes shook from the barrel-organ, round, bright notes, carelessly scattered.

Constantia lifted her big, cold hands as if to catch them, and then her hands fell again. She walked over to the mantelpiece to her favourite Buddha. And the stone and gilt image, whose smile always gave her such a queer feeling, almost a pain and yet a pleasant pain, seemed to-day to be more than smiling. He knew something; he had a secret. "I know something that you don't know," said her Buddha. Oh, what was it, what could it be? And yet she had always felt there was . . . something.

The sunlight pressed through the windows, thieved its way in, flashed its light over the furniture and the photographs. Josephine watched it. When it came to mother's photograph, the enlargement over the piano, it lingered as though puzzled



to find so little remained of mother, except the ear-rings shaped like tiny pagodas and a black feather boa. Why did the photographs of dead people always fade so? wondered Josephine. As soon as a person was dead their photograph died too. But, of course, this one of mother was very old. It was thirty-five years old. Josephine remembered standing on a chair and pointing out that feather boa to Constantia and telling her that it was a snake that had killed their mother in Ceylon. . . . Would everything have been different if mother hadn't died? She didn't see why. Aunt Florence had lived with them until they had left school, and they had moved three times and had their yearly holiday and . . . and there'd been changes of servants, of course.

Some little sparrows, young sparrows they sounded, chirped on the window-ledge. *Yeep — eyeep — yeep*. But Josephine felt they were not sparrows, not on the window-ledge. It was inside her, that queer little crying noise. *Yeep — eyeep — yeep*. Ah, what was it crying, so weak and forlorn?

If mother had lived, might they have married? But there had been nobody for them to marry. There had been father's Anglo-Indian friends before he quarrelled with them. But after that she and Constantia never met a single man except clergymen. How did one meet men? Or even if they'd met them, how could they have got to know men well enough to be more than strangers? One read of people having adventures, being followed, and so on. But nobody had ever followed Constantia and her. Oh yes, there had been one year at Eastbourne a mysterious man at their boarding-house who had put a note on the jug of hot water outside their bedroom door! But by the time Connie had found it the steam had made the writing too faint to read; they couldn't even make out to which of them it was addressed. And he had left next day. And that

was all. The rest had been looking after father, and at the same time keeping out of father's way. But now? But now? The thieving sun touched Josephine gently. She lifted her face. She was drawn over to the window by gentle beams. . . .

Until the barrel-organ stopped playing Constantia stayed before the Buddha, wondering, but not as usual, not vaguely. This time her wonder was like longing. She remembered the times she had come in here, crept out of bed in her nightgown when the moon was full, and lain on the floor with her arms outstretched, as though she was crucified. Why? The big, pale moon had made her do it. The horrible dancing figures on the carved screen had leered at her and she hadn't minded. She remembered too how, whenever they were at the seaside, she had gone off by herself and got as close to the sea as she could, and sung something, something she had made up, while she gazed all over that restless water. There had been this other life, running out, bringing things home in bags, getting things on approval, discussing them with Jug, and taking them back to get more things on approval, and arranging father's trays and trying not to annoy father. But it all seemed to have happened in a kind of tunnel. It wasn't real. It was only when she came out of the tunnel into the moonlight or by the sea or into a thunderstorm that she really felt herself. What did it mean? What was it she was always wanting? What did it all lead to? Now? Now?

She turned away from the Buddha with one of her vague gestures. She went over to where Josephine was standing. She wanted to say something to Josephine, something frightfully important, about — about the future and what . . .

"Don't you think perhaps —" she began.

But Josephine interrupted her. "I was wondering if now —" she murmured. They stopped; they waited for each other.

"Go on, Con," said Josephine.

"No, no, Jug; after you," said Constantia.

"No, say what you were going to say. You began," said Josephine.

"I . . . I'd rather hear what you were going to say first," said Constantia.

"Don't be absurd, Con."

"Really, Jug."

"Connie."

"Oh, *Jug!*"

A pause. Then Constantia said faintly, "I can't say what I was going to say, Jug, because I've forgotten what it was . . . that I was going to say."

Josephine was silent for a moment. She stared at a big cloud where the sun had been. Then she replied shortly, "I've forgotten too."

## RAIN <sup>1</sup>

By W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

It was nearly bed-time and when they awoke next morning land would be in sight. Dr. Macphail lit his pipe and, leaning over the rail, searched the heavens for the Southern Cross. After two years at the front and a wound that had taken longer to heal than it should, he was glad to settle down quietly at Apia for twelve months at least, and he felt already better for the journey. Since some of the passengers were leaving the ship next day at Pago-Pago they had had a little dance that evening and in his ears hammered still the harsh notes of the mechanical piano. But the deck was quiet at last. A little way off he saw his wife in a long chair talking with the Davidsons, and he strolled over to her. When he sat down under the light and took off his hat you saw that he had very red hair, with a bald patch on the crown, and the red, freckled skin which accompanies red hair; he was a man of forty, thin, with a pinched face, precise and rather pedantic; and he spoke with a Scots accent in a very low, quiet voice.

Between the Macphails and the Davidsons, who were missionaries, there had arisen the intimacy of shipboard, which is due to propinquity rather than to any community of taste. Their chief tie was the disapproval they shared of the men who spent their days and nights in the smoking-room playing poker or bridge and drinking. Mrs. Macphail was not a little flattered to think that she and her husband were the only people on board with whom the Davidsons were willing to associate, and

<sup>1</sup> From *The Trembling of a Leaf*, by W. Somerset Maugham, copyright, 1921, George H. Doran Company, publishers. By permission of the publishers.

even the doctor, shy but no fool, half unconsciously acknowledged the compliment. It was only because he was of an argumentative mind that in their cabin at night he permitted himself to carp.

"Mrs. Davidson was saying she didn't know how they'd have got through the journey if it hadn't been for us," said Mrs. Macphail, as she neatly brushed out her transformation. "She said we were really the only people on the ship they cared to know."

"I shouldn't have thought a missionary was such a big bug that he could afford to put on frills."

"It's not frills. I quite understand what she means. It wouldn't have been very nice for the Davidsons to have to mix with all that rough lot in the smoking-room."

"The founder of their religion wasn't so exclusive," said Dr. Macphail with a chuckle.

"I've asked you over and over again not to joke about religion," answered his wife. "I shouldn't like to have a nature like yours, Alec. You never look for the best in people."

He gave her a sidelong glance with his pale, blue eyes, but did not reply. After many years of married life he had learned that it was more conducive to peace to leave his wife with the last word. He was undressed before she was, and climbing into the upper bunk he settled down to read himself to sleep.

When he came on deck next morning they were close to land. He looked at it with greedy eyes. There was a thin strip of silver beach rising quickly to hills covered to the top with luxuriant vegetation. The coconut trees, thick and green, came nearly to the water's edge, and among them you saw the grass houses of the Samoans; and here and there, gleaming white, a little church. Mrs. Davidson came and stood beside him.



She was dressed in black and wore round her neck a gold chain, from which dangled a small cross. She was a little woman, with brown, dull hair very elaborately arranged, and she had prominent blue eyes behind invisible *pince-nez*. Her face was long, like a sheep's, but she gave no impression of foolishness, rather of extreme alertness; she had the quick movements of a bird. The most remarkable thing about her was her voice, high, metallic, and without inflection; it fell on the ear with a hard monotony, irritating to the nerves like the pitiless clamour of the pneumatic drill.

"This must seem like home to you," said Dr. Macphail, with his thin, difficult smile.

"Ours are low islands, you know, not like these. Coral. These are volcanic. We've got another ten days' journey to reach them."

"In these parts that's almost like being in the next street at home," said Dr. Macphail facetiously.

"Well, that's rather an exaggerated way of putting it, but one does look at distances differently in the South Seas. So far you're right."

Dr. Macphail sighed faintly.

"I'm glad we're not stationed here," she went on. "They say this is a terribly difficult place to work in. The steamers' touching makes the people unsettled; and then there's the naval station; that's bad for the natives. In our district we don't have difficulties like that to contend with. There are one or two traders, of course, but we take care to make them behave, and if they don't we make the place so hot for them they're glad to go."

Fixing the glasses on her nose she looked at the green island with a ruthless stare.

"It's almost a hopeless task for the missionaries here. I can

never be sufficiently thankful to God that we are at least spared that."

Davidson's district consisted of a group of islands to the North of Samoa; they were widely separated and he had frequently to go long distances by canoe. At these times his wife remained at their headquarters and managed the mission. Dr. Macphail felt his heart sink when he considered the efficiency with which she certainly managed it. She spoke of the depravity of the natives in a voice which nothing could hush, but with a vehemently unctuous horror. Her sense of delicacy was singular. Early in their acquaintance she had said to him:

"You know, their marriage customs when we first settled in the islands were so shocking that I couldn't possibly describe them to you. But I'll tell Mrs. Macphail and she'll tell you."

Then he had seen his wife and Mrs. Davidson, their deck-chairs close together, in earnest conversation for about two hours. As he walked past them backwards and forwards for the sake of exercise, he had heard Mrs. Davidson's agitated whisper, like the distant flow of a mountain torrent, and he saw by his wife's open mouth and pale face that she was enjoying an alarming experience. At night in their cabin she repeated to him with bated breath all she had heard.

"Well, what did I say to you?" cried Mrs. Davidson, exultant, next morning. "Did you ever hear anything more dreadful? You don't wonder that I couldn't tell you myself, do you? Even though you are a doctor."

Mrs. Davidson scanned his face. She had a dramatic eagerness to see that she had achieved the desired effect.

"Can you wonder that when we first went there our hearts sank? You'll hardly believe me when I tell you it was impossible to find a single good girl in any of the villages."

She used the word *good* in a severely technical manner.

"Mr. Davidson and I talked it over, and we made up our minds the first thing to do was to put down the dancing. The natives were crazy about dancing."

"I was not averse to it myself when I was a young man," said Dr. Macphail.

"I guessed as much when I heard you ask Mrs. Macphail to have a turn with you last night. I don't think there's any real harm if a man dances with his wife, but I was relieved that she wouldn't. Under the circumstances I thought it better that we should keep ourselves to ourselves."

"Under what circumstances?"

Mrs. Davidson gave him a quick look through her *pince-nez*, but did not answer his question.

"But among white people it's not quite the same," she went on, "though I must say I agree with Mr. Davidson, who says he can't understand how a husband can stand by and see his wife in another man's arms, and as far as I'm concerned I've never danced a step since I married. But the native dancing is quite another matter. It's not only immoral in itself, but it distinctly leads to immorality. However, I'm thankful to God that we stamped it out, and I don't think I'm wrong in saying that no one has danced in our district for eight years."

But now they came to the mouth of the harbour and Mrs. Macphail joined them. The ship turned sharply and steamed slowly in. It was a great land-locked harbour big enough to hold a fleet of battleships; and all around it rose, high and steep, the green hills. Near the entrance, getting such breeze as blew from the sea, stood the governor's house in a garden. The Stars and Stripes dangled languidly from a flagstaff. They passed two or three trim bungalows, and a tennis court, and then they came to the quay with its warehouses. Mrs. David-

son pointed out the schooner, moored two or three hundred yards from the side, which was to take them to Apia. There was a crowd of eager, noisy, and good-humoured natives come from all parts of the island, some from curiosity, others to barter with the travellers on their way to Sydney; and they brought pineapples and huge bunches of bananas, *tapa* cloths, necklaces of shells or sharks' teeth, *kava*-bowls, and models of war canoes. American sailors, neat and trim, clean-shaven and frank of face, sauntered among them, and there was a little group of officials. While their luggage was being landed the Macphails and Mrs. Davidson watched the crowd. Dr. Macphail looked at the yaws from which most of the children and the young boys seemed to suffer, disfiguring sores like torpid ulcers, and his professional eyes glistened when he saw for the first time in his experience cases of elephantiasis, men going about with a huge, heavy arm or dragging along a grossly disfigured leg. Men and women wore the *lava-lava*.

"It's a very indecent costume," said Mrs. Davidson. "Mr. Davidson thinks it should be prohibited by law. How can you expect people to be moral when they wear nothing but a strip of red cotton round their loins?"

"It's suitable enough to the climate," said the doctor, wiping the sweat off his head.

Now that they were on land the heat, though it was so early in the morning, was already oppressive. Closed in by its hills, not a breath of air came in to Pago-Pago.

"In our islands," Mrs. Davidson went on in her high-pitched tones, "we've practically eradicated the *lava-lava*. A few old men still continue to wear it, but that's all. The women have all taken to the Mother Hubbard, and the men wear trousers and singlets. At the very beginning of our stay Mr. Davidson said in one of his reports: the inhabitants of these islands will

never be thoroughly Christianised till every boy of more than ten years is made to wear a pair of trousers."

But Mrs. Davidson had given two or three of her birdlike glances at heavy grey clouds that came floating over the mouth of the harbour. A few drops began to fall.

"We'd better take shelter," she said.

They made their way with all the crowd to a great shed of corrugated iron, and the rain began to fall in torrents. They stood there for some time and then were joined by Mr. Davidson. He had been polite enough to the Macphails during the journey, but he had not his wife's sociability, and had spent much of his time reading. He was a silent, rather sullen man, and you felt that his affability was a duty that he imposed upon himself Christianly; he was by nature reserved and even morose. His appearance was singular. He was very tall and thin, with long limbs loosely jointed; hollow cheeks and curiously high cheek-bones; he had so cadaverous an air that it surprised you to notice how full and sensual were his lips. He wore his hair very long. His dark eyes, set deep in their sockets, were large and tragic; and his hands with their big, long fingers, were finely shaped; they gave him a look of great strength. But the most striking thing about him was the feeling he gave you of suppressed fire. It was impressive and vaguely troubling. He was not a man with whom any intimacy was possible.

He brought now unwelcome news. There was an epidemic of measles, a serious and often fatal disease among the Kanakas, on the island, and a case had developed among the crew of the schooner which was to take them on their journey. The sick man had been brought ashore and put in hospital on the quarantine station, but telegraphic instructions had been sent from Apia to say that the schooner would not be allowed to



enter the harbour till it was certain no other member of the crew was affected.

"It means we shall have to stay here for ten days at least."

"But I'm urgently needed at Apia," said Dr. Macphail.

"That can't be helped. If no more cases develop on board, the schooner will be allowed to sail with white passengers, but all native traffic is prohibited for three months."

"Is there a hotel here?" asked Mrs. Macphail.

Davidson gave a low chuckle.

"There's not."

"What shall we do then?"

"I've been talking to the governor. There's a trader along the front who has rooms that he rents, and my proposition is that as soon as the rain lets up we should go along there and see what we can do. Don't expect comfort. You've just got to be thankful if we get a bed to sleep on and a roof over our heads."

But the rain showed no sign of stopping, and at length with umbrellas and waterproofs they set out. There was no town, but merely a group of official buildings, a store or two, and at the back, among the coconut trees and plantains, a few native dwellings. The house they sought was about five minutes' walk from the wharf. It was a frame house of two storeys, with broad verandahs on both floors and a roof of corrugated iron. The owner was a half-caste named Horn, with a native wife surrounded by little brown children, and on the ground-floor he had a store where he sold canned goods and cottons. The rooms he showed them were almost bare of furniture. In the Macphails' there was nothing but a poor, worn bed with a ragged mosquito net, a rickety chair, and a washstand. They looked round with dismay. The rain poured down without ceasing.

"I'm not going to unpack more than we actually need," said Mrs. Macphail.

Mrs. Davidson came into the room as she was unlocking a portmanteau. She was very brisk and alert. The cheerless surroundings had no effect on her.

"If you'll take my advice you'll get a needle and cotton and start right in to mend the mosquito net," she said, "or you'll not be able to get a wink of sleep to-night."

"Will they be very bad?" asked Dr. Macphail.

"This is the season for them. When you're asked to a party at Government House at Apia you'll notice that all the ladies are given a pillow-slip to put their — their lower extremities in."

"I wish the rain would stop for a moment," said Mrs. Macphail. "I could try to make the place comfortable with more heart if the sun were shining."

"Oh, if you wait for that, you'll wait a long time. Pago-Pago is about the rainiest place in the Pacific. You see, the hills, and that bay, they attract the water, and one expects rain at this time of year anyway."

She looked from Macphail to his wife, standing helplessly in different parts of the room, like lost souls, and she pursed her lips. She saw that she must take them in hand. Feckless people like that made her impatient, but her hands itched to put everything in the order which came so naturally to her.

"Here, you give me a needle and cotton and I'll mend that net of yours, while you go on with your unpacking. Dinner's at one. Dr. Macphail, you'd better go down to the wharf and see that your heavy luggage has been put in a dry place. You know what these natives are, they're quite capable of storing it where the rain will beat in on it all the time."

The doctor put on his waterproof again and went downstairs.

At the door Mr. Horn was standing in conversation with the quartermaster of the ship they had just arrived in and a second-class passenger whom Dr. Macphail had seen several times on board. The quartermaster, a little, shrivelled man, extremely dirty, nodded to him as he passed.

"This is a bad job about the measles, doc," he said. "I see you've fixed yourself up already."

Dr. Macphail thought he was rather familiar, but he was a timid man and he did not take offence easily.

"Yes, we've got a room upstairs."

"Miss Thompson was sailing with you to Apia, so I've brought her along here."

The quartermaster pointed with his thumb to the woman standing by his side. She was twenty-seven perhaps, plump, and in a coarse fashion pretty. She wore a white dress and a large white hat. Her fat calves in white cotton stockings bulged over the tops of long white boots in glacé kid. She gave Macphail an ingratiating smile.

"The feller's tryin' to soak me a dollar and a half a day for the meanest sized room," she said in a hoarse voice.

"I tell you she's a friend of mine, Jo," said the quartermaster. "She can't pay more than a dollar, and you've sure got to take her for that."

The trader was fat and smooth and quietly smiling.

"Well, if you put it like that, Mr. Swan, I'll see what I can do about it. I'll talk to Mrs. Horn and if we think we can make a reduction we will."

"Don't try to pull that stuff with me," said Miss Thompson. "We'll settle this right now. You get a dollar a day for the room and not one bean more."

Dr. Macphail smiled. He admired the effrontery with which she bargained. He was the sort of man who always paid what

he was asked. He preferred to be over-charged than to haggle. The trader sighed.

"Well, to oblige Mr. Swan I'll take it."

"That's the goods," said Miss Thompson. "Come right in and have a shot of hooch. I've got some real good rye in that grip if you'll bring it along, Mr. Swan. You come along too, doctor."

"Oh, I don't think I will, thank you," he answered. "I'm just going down to see that our luggage is all right."

He stepped out into the rain. It swept in from the opening of the harbour in sheets and the opposite shore was all blurred. He passed two or three natives clad in nothing but the *lava-lava*, with huge umbrellas over them. They walked finely, with leisurely movements, very upright; and they smiled and greeted him in a strange tongue as they went by.

It was nearly dinner-time when he got back, and their meal was laid in the trader's parlour. It was a room designed not to live in but for purposes of prestige, and it had a musty, melancholy air. A suite of stamped plush was arranged neatly round the walls, and from the middle of the ceiling, protected from the flies by yellow tissue paper, hung a gilt chandelier. Davidson did not come.

"I know he went to call on the governor," said Mrs. Davidson, "and I guess he's kept him to dinner."

A little native girl brought them a dish of Hamburger steak, and after a while the trader came up to see that they had everything they wanted.

"I see we have a fellow lodger, Mr. Horn," said Dr. Macphail.

"She's taken a room, that's all," answered the trader. "She's getting her own board."

He looked at the two ladies with an obsequious air.

"I put her downstairs so she shouldn't be in the way. She won't be any trouble to you."

"Is it someone who was on the boat?" asked Mrs. Macphail.

"Yes, ma'am, she was in the second cabin. She was going to Apia. She has a position as cashier waiting for her."

"Oh!"

When the trader was gone Macphail said:

"I shouldn't think she'd find it exactly cheerful having her meals in her room."

"If she was in the second cabin I guess she'd rather," answered Mrs. Davidson. "I don't exactly know who it can be."

"I happened to be there when the quartermaster brought her along. Her name's Thompson."

"It's not the woman who was dancing with the quartermaster last night?" asked Mrs. Davidson.

"That's who it must be," said Mrs. Macphail. "I wondered at the time what she was. She looked rather fast to me."

"Not good style at all," said Mrs. Davidson.

They began to talk of other things, and after dinner, tired with their early rise, they separated and slept. When they awoke, though the sky was still grey and the clouds hung low, it was not raining and they went for a walk on the high road which the Americans had built along the bay.

On their return they found that Davidson had just come in.

"We may be here for a fortnight," he said irritably. "I've argued it out with the governor, but he says there is nothing to be done."

"Mr. Davidson's just longing to get back to his work," said his wife, with an anxious glance at him.

"We've been away for a year," he said, walking up and down the verandah. "The mission has been in charge of native missionaries and I'm terribly nervous that they've let things slide.



They're good men, I'm not saying a word against them, God-fearing, devout, and truly Christian men — their Christianity would put many so-called Christians at home to the blush — but they're pitifully lacking in energy. They can make a stand once, they can make a stand twice, but they can't make a stand all the time. If you leave a mission in charge of a native missionary, no matter how trustworthy he seems, in course of time you'll find he's let abuses creep in."

Mr. Davidson stood still. With his tall, spare form, and his great eyes flashing out of his pale face, he was an impressive figure. His sincerity was obvious in the fire of his gestures and in his deep, ringing voice.

"I expect to have my work cut out for me. I shall act and I shall act promptly. If the tree is rotten it shall be cut down and cast into the flames."

And in the evening after the high-tea which was their last meal, while they sat in the stiff parlour, the ladies working and Dr. Macphail smoking his pipe, the missionary told them of his work in the islands.

"When we went there they had no sense of sin at all," he said. "They broke the commandments one after the other and never knew they were doing wrong. And I think that was the most difficult part of my work, to instil into the natives the sense of sin."

The Macphails knew already that Davidson had worked in the Solomons for five years before he met his wife. She had been a missionary in China, and they had become acquainted in Boston, where they were both spending part of their leave to attend a missionary congress. On their marriage they had been appointed to the islands in which they had laboured ever since.

In the course of all the conversations they had had with Mr.

Davidson one thing had shone out clearly and that was the man's unflinching courage. He was a medical missionary, and he was liable to be called at any time to one or other of the islands in the group. Even the whaleboat is not so very safe a conveyance in the stormy Pacific of the wet season, but often he would be sent for in a canoe, and then the danger was great. In cases of illness or accident he never hesitated. A dozen times he had spent the whole night baling for his life, and more than once Mrs. Davidson had given him up for lost.

"I'd beg him not to go sometimes," she said, "or at least to wait till the weather was more settled, but he'd never listen. He's obstinate, and when he's once made up his mind, nothing can move him."

"How can I ask the natives to put their trust in the Lord if I am afraid to do so myself?" cried Davidson. "And I'm not, I'm not. They know that if they send for me in their trouble I'll come if it's humanly possible. And do you think the Lord is going to abandon me when I am on his business? The wind blows at his bidding and the waves toss and rage at his word."

Dr. Macphail was a timid man. He had never been able to get used to the hurtling of the shells over the trenches, and when he was operating in an advanced dressing-station the sweat poured from his brow and dimmed his spectacles in the effort he made to control his unsteady hand. He shuddered a little as he looked at the missionary.

"I wish I could say that I've never been afraid," he said.

"I wish you could say that you believed in God," retorted the other.

But for some reason, that evening the missionary's thoughts travelled back to the early days he and his wife had spent on the islands.

"Sometimes Mrs. Davidson and I would look at one another

and the tears would stream down our cheeks. We worked without ceasing, day and night, and we seemed to make no progress. I don't know what I should have done without her then. When I felt my heart sink, when I was very near despair, she gave me courage and hope."

Mrs. Davidson looked down at her work, and a slight colour rose to her thin cheeks. Her hands trembled a little. She did not trust herself to speak.

"We had no one to help us. We were alone, thousands of miles from any of our own people, surrounded by darkness. When I was broken and weary she would put her work aside and take the Bible and read to me till peace came and settled upon me like sleep upon the eyelids of a child, and when at last she closed the book she'd say: 'We'll save them in spite of themselves.' And I felt strong again in the Lord, and I answered: 'Yes, with God's help I'll save them. I must save them.'"

He came over to the table and stood in front of it as though it were a lectern.

"You see, they were so naturally depraved that they couldn't be brought to see their wickedness. We had to make sins out of what they thought were natural actions. We had to make it a sin, not only to commit adultery and to lie and thief, but to expose their bodies, and to dance and not to come to church. I made it a sin for a girl to show her bosom and a sin for a man not to wear trousers."

"How?" asked Dr. Macphail, not without surprise.

"I instituted fines. Obviously the only way to make people realise that an action is sinful is to punish them if they commit it. I fined them if they didn't come to church, and I fined them if they danced. I fined them if they were improperly dressed. I had a tariff, and every sin had to be paid for either in money or work. And at last I made them understand."

"But did they never refuse to pay?"

"How could they?" asked the missionary.

"It would be a brave man who tried to stand up against Mr. Davidson," said his wife, tightening her lips.

Dr. Macphail looked at Davidson with troubled eyes. What he heard shocked him, but he hesitated to express his disapproval.

"You must remember that in the last resort I could expel them from their church membership."

"Did they mind that?"

Davidson smiled a little and gently rubbed his hands.

"They couldn't sell their copra. When the men fished they got no share of the catch. It meant something very like starvation. Yes, they minded quite a lot."

"Tell him about Fred Ohlson," said Mrs. Davidson.

The missionary fixed his fiery eyes on Dr. Macphail.

"Fred Ohlson was a Danish trader who had been in the islands a good many years. He was a pretty rich man as traders go and he wasn't very pleased when we came. You see, he'd had things very much his own way. He paid the natives what he liked for their copra, and he paid in goods and whiskey. He had a native wife, but he was flagrantly unfaithful to her. He was a drunkard. I gave him a chance to mend his ways, but he wouldn't take it. He laughed at me."

Davidson's voice fell to a deep bass as he said the last words, and he was silent for a minute or two. The silence was heavy with menace.

"In two years he was a ruined man. He'd lost everything he'd saved in a quarter of a century. I broke him, and at last he was forced to come to me like a beggar and beseech me to give him a passage back to Sydney."

"I wish you could have seen him when he came to see Mr.

Davidson," said the missionary's wife. "He had been a fine, powerful man, with a lot of fat on him, and he had a great big voice, but now he was half the size, and he was shaking all over. He'd suddenly become an old man."

With abstracted gaze Davidson looked out into the night. The rain was falling again.

Suddenly from below came a sound, and Davidson turned and looked questioningly at his wife. It was the sound of a gramophone, harsh and loud, wheezing out a syncopated tune.

"What's that?" he asked.

Mrs. Davidson fixed her *pince-nez* more firmly on her nose.

"One of the second-class passengers has a room in the house. I guess it comes from there."

They listened in silence, and presently they heard the sound of dancing. Then the music stopped, and they heard the popping of corks and voices raised in animated conversation.

"I daresay she's giving a farewell party to her friends on board," said Dr. Macphail. "The ship sails at twelve, doesn't it?"

Davidson made no remark, but he looked at his watch.

"Are you ready?" he asked his wife.

She got up and folded her work.

"Yes, I guess I am," she answered.

"It's early to go to bed yet, isn't it?" said the doctor.

"We have a good deal of reading to do," explained Mrs. Davidson. "Wherever we are, we read a chapter of the Bible before retiring for the night and we study it with the commentaries, you know, and discuss it thoroughly. It's a wonderful training for the mind."

The two couples bade one another good night. Dr. and Mrs. Macphail were left alone. For two or three minutes they did not speak.



"I think I'll go and fetch the cards," the doctor said at last.

Mrs. Macphail looked at him doubtfully. Her conversation with the Davidsons had left her a little uneasy, but she did not like to say that she thought they had better not play cards when the Davidsons might come in at any moment. Dr. Macphail brought them and she watched him, though with a vague sense of guilt, while he laid out his patience. Below the sound of revelry continued.

It was fine enough next day, and the Macphails, condemned to spend a fortnight of idleness at Pago-Pago, set about making the best of things. They went down to the quay and got out of their boxes a number of books. The doctor called on the chief surgeon of the naval hospital and went round the beds with him. They left cards on the governor. They passed Miss Thompson on the road. The doctor took off his hat, and she gave him a "Good morning, doc.," in a loud, cheerful voice. She was dressed as on the day before, in a white frock, and her shiny white boots with their high heels, her fat legs bulging over the tops of them, were strange things on that exotic scene.

"I don't think she's very suitably dressed, I must say," said Mrs. Macphail. "She looks extremely common to me."

When they got back to their house, she was on the verandah playing with one of the trader's dark children.

"Say a word to her," Dr. Macphail whispered to his wife. "She's all alone here, and it seems rather unkind to ignore her."

Mrs. Macphail was shy, but she was in the habit of doing what her husband bade her.

"I think we're fellow lodgers here," she said, rather foolishly.

"Terrible, ain't it, bein' cooped up in a one-horse burg like this?" answered Miss Thompson. "And they tell me I'm lucky to have gotten a room. I don't see myself livin' in a

native house, and that's what some have to do. I don't know why they don't have a hotel."

They exchanged a few more words. Miss Thompson, loud-voiced and garrulous, was evidently quite willing to gossip, but Mrs. Macphail had a poor stock of small talk and presently she said:

"Well, I think we must go upstairs."

In the evening when they sat down to their high-tea Davidson on coming in said:

"I see that woman downstairs has a couple of sailors sitting there. I wonder how she's gotten acquainted with them."

"She can't be very particular," said Mrs. Davidson.

They were all rather tired after the idle, aimless day.

"If there's going to be a fortnight of this I don't know what we shall feel like at the end of it," said Dr. Macphail.

"The only thing to do is to portion out the day to different activities," answered the missionary. "I shall set aside a certain number of hours to study and a certain number to exercise, rain or fine — in the wet season you can't afford to pay any attention to the rain — and a certain number to recreation."

Dr. Macphail looked at his companion with misgiving. Davidson's programme oppressed him. They were eating Hamburger steak again. It seemed the only dish the cook knew how to make. Then below the gramophone began. Davidson started nervously when he heard it, but said nothing. Men's voices floated up. Miss Thompson's guests were joining in a well-known song and presently they heard her voice too, hoarse and loud. There was a good deal of shouting and laughing. The four people upstairs, trying to make conversation, listened despite themselves to the clink of glasses and the scrape of chairs. More people had evidently come. Miss Thompson was giving a party.

"I wonder how she gets them all in," said Mrs. Macphail, suddenly breaking into a medical conversation between the missionary and her husband.

It showed whither her thoughts were wandering. The twitch of Davidson's face proved that, though he spoke of scientific things, his mind was busy in the same direction. Suddenly, while the doctor was giving some experience of practice on the Flanders front, rather prosily, he sprang to his feet with a cry.

"What's the matter, Alfred?" asked Mrs. Davidson.

"Of course! It never occurred to me. She's out of Iwelei."

"She can't be."

"She came on board at Honolulu. It's obvious. And she's carrying on her trade here. Here."

He uttered the last word with a passion of indignation.

"What's Iwelei?" asked Mrs. Macphail.

He turned his gloomy eyes on her and his voice trembled with horror.

"The plague spot of Honolulu. The Red Light district. It was a blot on our civilisation."

Iwelei was on the edge of the city. You went down side streets by the harbour, in the darkness, across a rickety bridge, till you came to a deserted road, all ruts and holes, and then suddenly you came out into the light. There was parking room for motors on each side of the road, and there were saloons, tawdry and bright, each one noisy with its mechanical piano, and there were barbers' shops and tobacconists. There was a stir in the air and a sense of expectant gaiety. You turned down a narrow alley, either to the right or to the left, for the road divided Iwelei into two parts, and you found yourself in the district. There were rows of little bungalows, trim and neatly painted in green, and the pathway between them was broad and straight. It was laid out like a garden-city. In its

respectable regularity, its order and spruceness, it gave an impression of sardonic horror; for never can the search for love have been so systematised and ordered. The pathways were lit by a rare lamp, but they would have been dark except for the lights that came from the open windows of the bungalows. Men wandered about, looking at the women who sat at their windows, reading or sewing, for the most part taking no notice of the passers-by; and like the women they were of all nationalities. There were Americans, sailors from the ships in port, enlisted men off the gunboats, sombrely drunk, and soldiers from the regiments, white and black, quartered on the island; there were Japanese, walking in twos and threes; Hawaiians, Chinese in long robes, and Filipinos in preposterous hats. They were silent and as it were oppressed. Desire is sad.

"It was the most crying scandal of the Pacific," exclaimed Davidson vehemently. "The missionaries had been agitating against it for years, and at last the local press took it up. The police refused to stir. You know their argument. They say that vice is inevitable and consequently the best thing is to localise and control it. The truth is, they were paid. Paid. They were paid by the saloon-keepers, paid by the bullies, paid by the women themselves. At last they were forced to move."

"I read about it in the papers that came on board in Honolulu," said Dr. Macphail.

"Iwelei, with its sin and shame, ceased to exist on the very day we arrived. The whole population was brought before the justices. I don't know why I didn't understand at once what that woman was."

"Now you come to speak of it," said Mrs. Macphail, "I remember seeing her come on board only a few minutes before the boat sailed. I remember thinking at the time she was cutting it rather fine."

"How dare she come here!" cried Davidson indignantly.  
"I'm not going to allow it."

He strode towards the door.

"What are you going to do?" asked Macphail.

"What do you expect me to do? I'm going to stop it. I'm not going to have this house turned into — into . . ."

He sought for a word that should not offend the ladies' ears. His eyes were flashing and his pale face was paler still in his emotion.

"It sounds as though there were three or four men down there," said the doctor. "Don't you think it's rather rash to go in just now?"

The missionary gave him a contemptuous look and without a word flung out of the room.

"You know Mr. Davidson very little if you think the fear of personal danger can stop him in the performance of his duty," said his wife.

She sat with her hands nervously clasped, a spot of colour on her high cheek-bones, listening to what was about to happen below. They all listened. They heard him clatter down the wooden stairs and throw open the door. The singing stopped suddenly, but the gramophone continued to bray out its vulgar tune. They heard Davidson's voice and then the noise of something heavy falling. The music stopped. He had hurled the gramophone on the floor. Then again they heard Davidson's voice, they could not make out the words, then Miss Thompson's, loud and shrill, then a confused clamour as though several people were shouting together at the top of their lungs. Mrs. Davidson gave a little gasp, and she clenched her hands more tightly. Dr. Macphail looked uncertainly from her to his wife. He did not want to go down, but he wondered if they expected him to. Then there was something that sounded like



a scuffle. The noise now was more distinct. It might be that Davidson was being thrown out of the room. The door was slammed. There was a moment's silence and they heard Davidson come up the stairs again. He went to his room.

"I think I'll go to him," said Mrs. Davidson.

She got up and went out.

"If you want me, just call," said Mrs. Macphail, and then when the other was gone: "I hope he isn't hurt."

"Why couldn't he mind his own business?" said Dr. Macphail.

They sat in silence for a minute or two and then they both started, for the gramophone began to play once more, defiantly, and mocking voices shouted hoarsely the words of an obscene song.

Next day Mrs. Davidson was pale and tired. She complained of headache, and she looked old and wizened. She told Mrs. Macphail that the missionary had not slept at all; he had passed the night in a state of frightful agitation and at five had got up and gone out. A glass of beer had been thrown over him and his clothes were stained and stinking. But a sombre fire glowed in Mrs. Davidson's eyes when she spoke of Miss Thompson.

"She'll bitterly rue the day when she flouted Mr. Davidson," she said. "Mr. Davidson has a wonderful heart and no one who is in trouble has ever gone to him without being comforted, but he has no mercy for sin, and when his righteous wrath is excited he's terrible."

"Why, what will he do?" asked Mrs. Macphail.

"I don't know, but I wouldn't stand in that creature's shoes for anything in the world."

Mrs. Macphail shuddered. There was something positively alarming in the triumphant assurance of the little woman's

manner. They were going out together that morning, and they went down the stairs side by side. Miss Thompson's door was open, and they saw her in a bedraggled dressing-gown, cooking something in a chafing-dish.

"Good morning," she called. "Is Mr. Davidson better this morning?"

They passed her in silence, with their noses in the air, as if she did not exist. They flushed, however, when she burst into a shout of derisive laughter. Mrs. Davidson turned on her suddenly.

"Don't you dare to speak to me," she screamed. "If you insult me I shall have you turned out of here."

"Say, did I ask Mr. Davidson to visit with me?"

"Don't answer her," whispered Mrs. Macphail hurriedly.

They walked on till they were out of earshot.

"She's brazen, brazen," burst from Mrs. Davidson.

Her anger almost suffocated her.

And on their way home they met her strolling towards the quay. She had all her finery on. Her great white hat with its vulgar, showy flowers was an affront. She called out cheerily to them as she went by, and a couple of American sailors who were standing there grinned as the ladies set their faces to an icy stare. They got in just before the rain began to fall again.

"I guess she'll get her fine clothes spoilt," said Mrs. Davidson with a bitter sneer.

Davidson did not come in till they were half way through dinner. He was wet through, but he would not change. He sat, morose and silent, refusing to eat more than a mouthful, and he stared at the slanting rain. When Mrs. Davidson told him of their two encounters with Miss Thompson he did not answer. His deepening frown alone showed that he had heard.

"Don't you think we ought to make Mr. Horn turn her out

of here?" asked Mrs. Davidson. "We can't allow her to insult us."

"There doesn't seem to be any other place for her to go," said Macphail.

"She can live with one of the natives."

"In weather like this a native hut must be a rather uncomfortable place to live in."

"I lived in one for years," said the missionary.

When the little native girl brought in the fried bananas which formed the sweet they had every day, Davidson turned to her.

"Ask Miss Thompson when it would be convenient for me to see her," he said.

The girl nodded shyly and went out.

"What do you want to see her for, Alfred?" asked his wife.

"It's my duty to see her. I won't act till I've given her every chance."

"You don't know what she is. She'll insult you."

"Let her insult me. Let her spit on me. She has an immortal soul, and I must do all that is in my power to save it."

Mrs. Davidson's ears rang still with the harlot's mocking laughter.

"She's gone too far."

"Too far for the mercy of God?" His eyes lit up suddenly and his voice grew mellow and soft. "Never. The sinner may be deeper in sin than the depth of hell itself, but the love of the Lord Jesus can reach him still."

The girl came back with the message.

"Miss Thompson's compliments and as long as Rev. Davidson don't come in business hours she'll be glad to see him any time."

The party received it in stony silence, and Dr. Macphail quickly effaced from his lips the smile which had come upon

them. He knew his wife would be vexed with him if he found Miss Thompson's effrontery amusing.

They finished the meal in silence. When it was over the two ladies got up and took their work. Mrs. Macphail was making another of the innumerable comforters which she had turned out since the beginning of the war, and the doctor lit his pipe. But Davidson remained in his chair and with abstracted eyes stared at the table. At last he got up and without a word went out of the room. They heard him go down and they heard Miss Thompson's defiant "Come in" when he knocked at the door. He remained with her for an hour. And Dr. Macphail watched the rain. It was beginning to get on his nerves. It was not like our soft English rain that drops gently on the earth; it was unmerciful and somehow terrible; you felt in it the malignancy of the primitive powers of nature. It did not pour, it flowed. It was like a deluge from heaven, and it rattled on the roof of corrugated iron with a steady persistence that was maddening. It seemed to have a fury of its own. And sometimes you felt that you must scream if it did not stop, and then suddenly you felt powerless, as though your bones had suddenly become soft; and you were miserable and hopeless.

Macphail turned his head when the missionary came back. The two women looked up.

"I've given her every chance. I have exhorted her to repent. She is an evil woman."

He paused, and Dr. Macphail saw his eyes darken and his pale face grow hard and stern.

"Now I shall take the whips with which the Lord Jesus drove the usurers and the money changers out of the Temple of the Most High."

He walked up and down the room. His mouth was close set, and his black brows were frowning.

"If she fled to the uttermost parts of the earth I should pursue her."

With a sudden movement he turned round and strode out of the room. They heard him go downstairs again.

"What is he going to do?" asked Mrs. Macphail.

"I don't know." Mrs. Davidson took off her *pince-nez* and wiped them. "When he is on the Lord's work I never ask him questions."

She sighed a little.

"What is the matter?"

"He'll wear himself out. He doesn't know what it is to spare himself."

Dr. Macphail learnt the first results of the missionary's activity from the half-caste trader in whose house they lodged. He stopped the doctor when he passed the store and came out to speak to him on the stoop. His fat face was worried.

"The Rev. Davidson has been at me for letting Miss Thompson have a room here," he said, "but I didn't know what she was when I rented it to her. When people come and ask if I can rent them a room all I want to know is if they've the money to pay for it. And she paid me for hers a week in advance."

Dr. Macphail did not want to commit himself.

"When all's said and done it's your house. We're very much obliged to you for taking us in at all."

Horn looked at him doubtfully. He was not certain yet how definitely Macphail stood on the missionary's side.

"The missionaries are in with one another," he said, hesitatingly. "If they get it in for a trader he may just as well shut up his store and quit."

"Did he want you to turn her out?"

"No, he said so long as she behaved herself he couldn't ask me



to do that. He said he wanted to be just to me. I promised she shouldn't have no more visitors. I've just been and told her."

"How did she take it?"

"She gave me Hell."

The trader squirmed in his old ducks. He had found Miss Thompson a rough customer.

"Oh, well, I daresay she'll get out. I don't suppose she wants to stay here if she can't have anyone in."

"There's nowhere she can go, only a native house, and no native'll take her now, not now that the missionaries have got their knife in her."

Dr. Macphail looked at the falling rain.

"Well, I don't suppose it's any good waiting for it to clear up."

In the evening when they sat in the parlour Davidson talked to them of his early days at college. He had had no means and had worked his way through by doing odd jobs during the vacations. There was silence downstairs. Miss Thompson was sitting in her little room alone. But suddenly the gramophone began to play. She had set it on in defiance, to cheat her loneliness, but there was no one to sing, and it had a melancholy note. It was like a cry for help. Davidson took no notice. He was in the middle of a long anecdote and without change of expression went on. The gramophone continued. Miss Thompson put on one reel after another. It looked as though the silence of the night were getting on her nerves. It was breathless and sultry. When the Macphails went to bed they could not sleep. They lay side by side with their eyes wide open, listening to the cruel singing of the mosquitoes outside their curtain.

"What's that?" whispered Mrs. Macphail at last.

They heard a voice, Davidson's voice, through the wooden partition. It went on with a monotonous, earnest insistence. He was praying aloud. He was praying for the soul of Miss Thompson.

Two or three days went by. Now when they passed Miss Thompson on the road she did not greet them with ironic cordiality or smile; she passed with her nose in the air, a sulky look on her painted face, frowning, as though she did not see them. The trader told Macphail that she had tried to get lodging elsewhere, but had failed. In the evening she played through the various reels of her gramophone, but the pretence of mirth was obvious now. The ragtime had a cracked, heart-broken rhythm as though it were a one-step of despair. When she began to play on Sunday Davidson sent Horn to beg her to stop at once since it was the Lord's day. The reel was taken off and the house was silent except for the steady pattering of the rain on the iron roof.

"I think she's getting a bit worked up," said the trader next day to Macphail. "She don't know what Mr. Davidson's up to and it makes her scared."

Macphail had caught a glimpse of her that morning and it struck him that her arrogant expression had changed. There was in her face a hunted look. The half-caste gave him a side-long glance.

"I suppose you don't know what Mr. Davidson is doing about it?" he hazarded.

"No, I don't."

It was singular that Horn should ask him that question, for he also had the idea that the missionary was mysteriously at work. He had an impression that he was weaving a net around the woman, carefully, systematically, and suddenly, when everything was ready, would pull the strings tight.

"He told me to tell her," said the trader, "that if at any time she wanted him she only had to send and he'd come."

"What did she say when you told her that?"

"She didn't say nothing. I didn't stop. I just said what he said I was to and then I beat it. I thought she might be going to start weepin'."

"I have no doubt the loneliness is getting on her nerves," said the doctor. "And the rain — that's enough to make anyone jumpy," he continued irritably. "Doesn't it ever stop in this confounded place?"

"It goes on pretty steady in the rainy season. We have three hundred inches in the year. You see, it's the shape of the bay. It seems to attract the rain from all over the Pacific."

"Damn the shape of the bay," said the doctor.

He scratched his mosquito bites. He felt very short-tempered. When the rain stopped and the sun shone, it was like a hothouse, seething, humid, sultry, breathless, and you had a strange feeling that everything was growing with a savage violence. The natives, blithe and childlike by reputation, seemed then, with their tattooing and their dyed hair, to have something sinister in their appearance; and when they pattered along at your heels with their naked feet you looked back instinctively. You felt they might at any moment come behind you swiftly and thrust a long knife between your shoulder blades. You could not tell what dark thoughts lurked behind their wide-set eyes. They had a little the look of ancient Egyptians painted on a temple wall, and there was about them the terror of what is immeasurably old.

The missionary came and went. He was busy, but the Macphails did not know what he was doing. Horn told the doctor that he saw the governor every day, and once Davidson mentioned him.

"He looks as if he had plenty of determination," he said, "but when you come down to brass tacks he has no backbone."

"I suppose that means he won't do exactly what you want," suggested the doctor facetiously.

The missionary did not smile.

"I want him to do what's right. It shouldn't be necessary to persuade a man to do that."

"But there may be differences of opinion about what is right."

"If a man had a gangrenous foot would you have patience with anyone who hesitated to amputate it?"

"Gangrene is a matter of fact."

"And Evil?"

What Davidson had done soon appeared. The four of them had just finished their midday meal, and they had not yet separated for the siesta which the heat imposed on the ladies and on the doctor. Davidson had little patience with the slothful habit. The door was suddenly flung open and Miss Thompson came in. She looked round the room and then went up to Davidson.

"You low-down skunk, what have you been saying about me to the governor?"

She was spluttering with rage. There was a moment's pause. Then the missionary drew forward a chair.

"Won't you be seated, Miss Thompson? I've been hoping to have another talk with you."

"You poor low-life bastard."

She burst into a torrent of insult, foul and insolent. Davidson kept his grave eyes on her.

"I'm indifferent to the abuse you think fit to heap on me, Miss Thompson," he said, "but I must beg you to remember that ladies are present."

Tears by now were struggling with her anger. Her face was red and swollen as though she were choking.

"What has happened?" asked Dr. Macphail.

"A feller's just been in here and he says I gotter beat it on the next boat."

Was there a gleam in the missionary's eyes? His face remained impassive.

"You could hardly expect the governor to let you stay here under the circumstances."

"You done it," she shrieked. "You can't kid me. You done it."

"I don't want to deceive you. I urged the governor to take the only possible step consistent with his obligations."

"Why couldn't you leave me be? I wasn't doin' you no harm."

"You may be sure that if you had I should be the last man to resent it."

"Do you think I want to stay on in this poor imitation of a burg? I don't look no busher, do I?"

"In that case I don't see what cause of complaint you have," he answered.

She gave an inarticulate cry of rage and flung out of the room. There was a short silence.

"It's a relief to know that the governor has acted at last," said Davidson finally. "He's a weak man and he shilly-shallied. He said she was only here for a fortnight anyway, and if she went on to Apia that was under British jurisdiction and had nothing to do with him."

The missionary sprang to his feet and strode across the room.

"It's terrible the way the men who are in authority seek to evade their responsibility. They speak as though evil that was out of sight ceased to be evil. The very existence of that



woman is a scandal and it does not help matters to shift it to another of the islands. In the end I had to speak straight from the shoulder."

Davidson's brow lowered, and he protruded his firm chin. He looked fierce and determined.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Our mission is not entirely without influence at Washington. I pointed out to the governor that it wouldn't do him any good if there was a complaint about the way he managed things here."

"When has she got to go?" asked the doctor, after a pause.

"The San Francisco boat is due here from Sydney next Tuesday. She's to sail on that."

That was in five days' time. It was next day, when he was coming back from the hospital where for want of something better to do Macphail spent most of his mornings, that the half-caste stopped him as he was going upstairs.

"Excuse me, Dr. Macphail, Miss Thompson's sick. Will you have a look at her?"

"Certainly."

Horn led him to her room. She was sitting in a chair idly, neither reading nor sewing, staring in front of her. She wore her white dress and the large hat with the flowers on it. Macphail noticed that her skin was yellow and muddy under her powder, and her eyes were heavy.

"I'm sorry to hear you're not well," he said.

"Oh, I ain't sick really. I just said that, because I just had to see you. I've got to clear on a boat that's going to 'Frisco."

She looked at him and he saw that her eyes were suddenly startled. She opened and clenched her hands spasmodically. The trader stood at the door, listening.

"So I understand," said the doctor.

She gave a little gulp.

"I guess it ain't very convenient for me to go to 'Frisco just now. I went to see the governor yesterday afternoon, but I couldn't get to him. I saw the secretary, and he told me I'd got to take that boat and that was all there was to it. I just had to see the governor, so I waited outside his house this morning, and when he come out I spoke to him. He didn't want to speak to me, I'll say, but I wouldn't let him shake me off, and at last he said he hadn't no objection to my staying here till the next boat to Sydney if the Rev. Davidson will stand for it."

She stopped and looked at Dr. Macphail anxiously.

"I don't know exactly what I can do," he said.

"Well, I thought maybe you wouldn't mind asking him. I swear to God I won't start anything here if he'll just only let me stay. I won't go out of the house if that'll suit him. It's no more'n a fortnight."

"I'll ask him."

"He won't stand for it," said Horn. "He'll have you out on Tuesday, so you may as well make up your mind to it."

"Tell him I can get work in Sydney, straight stuff, I mean. 'Tain't asking very much."

"I'll do what I can."

"And come and tell me right away, will you? I can't set down to a thing till I get the dope one way or the other."

It was not an errand that much pleased the doctor, and, characteristically perhaps, he went about it indirectly. He told his wife what Miss Thompson had said to him and asked her to speak to Mrs. Davidson. The missionary's attitude seemed rather arbitrary and it could do no harm if the girl were allowed to stay in Pago-Pago another fortnight. But he was not prepared for the result of his diplomacy. The missionary came to him straightway.

"Mrs. Davidson tells me that Thompson has been speaking to you."

Dr. Macphail, thus directly tackled, had the shy man's resentment at being forced out into the open. He felt his temper rising, and he flushed.

"I don't see that it can make any difference if she goes to Sydney rather than to San Francisco, and so long as she promises to behave while she's here it's dashed hard to persecute her."

The missionary fixed him with his stern eyes.

"Why is she unwilling to go back to San Francisco?"

"I didn't enquire," answered the doctor with some asperity.

"And I think one does better to mind one's own business."

Perhaps it was not a very tactful answer.

"The governor has ordered her to be deported by the first boat that leaves the island. He's only done his duty and I will not interfere. Her presence is a peril here."

"I think you're very harsh and tyrannical."

The two ladies looked up at the doctor with some alarm, but they need not have feared a quarrel, for the missionary smiled gently.

"I'm terribly sorry you should think that of me, Dr. Macphail. Believe me, my heart bleeds for that unfortunate woman, but I'm only trying to do my duty."

The doctor made no answer. He looked out of the window sullenly. For once it was not raining and across the bay you saw nestling among the trees the huts of a native village.

"I think I'll take advantage of the rain stopping to go out," he said.

"Please don't bear me malice because I can't accede to your wish," said Davidson, with a melancholy smile. "I respect you very much, doctor, and I should be sorry if you thought ill of me."

"I have no doubt you have a sufficiently good opinion of yourself to bear mine with equanimity," he retorted.

"That's one on me," chuckled Davidson.

When Dr. Macphail, vexed with himself because he had been uncivil to no purpose, went downstairs, Miss Thompson was waiting for him with her door ajar.

"Well," she said, "have you spoken to him?"

"Yes, I'm sorry, he won't do anything," he answered, not looking at her in his embarrassment.

But then he gave her a quick glance, for a sob broke from her. He saw that her face was white with fear. It gave him a shock of dismay. And suddenly he had an idea.

"But don't give up hope yet. I think it's a shame the way they're treating you and I'm going to see the governor myself."

"Now?"

He nodded. Her face brightened.

"Say, that's real good of you. I'm sure he'll let me stay if you speak for me. I just won't do a thing I didn't ought all the time I'm here."

Dr. Macphail hardly knew why he had made up his mind to appeal to the governor. He was perfectly indifferent to Miss Thompson's affairs, but the missionary had irritated him, and with him temper was a smouldering thing. He found the governor at home. He was a large, handsome man, a sailor, with a grey toothbrush moustache; and he wore a spotless uniform of white drill.

"I've come to see you about a woman who's lodging in the same house as we are," he said. "Her name's Thompson."

"I guess I've heard nearly enough about her, Dr. Macphail," said the governor, smiling. "I've given her the order to get out next Tuesday and that's all I can do."

"I wanted to ask you if you couldn't stretch a point and

let her stay here till the boat comes in from San Francisco so that she can go to Sydney. I will guarantee her good behaviour."

The governor continued to smile, but his eyes grew small and serious.

"I'd be very glad to oblige you, Dr. Macphail, but I've given the order and it must stand."

The doctor put the case as reasonably as he could, but now the governor ceased to smile at all. He listened sullenly, with averted gaze. Macphail saw that he was making no impression.

"I'm sorry to cause any lady inconvenience, but she'll have to sail on Tuesday and that's all there is to it."

"But what difference can it make?"

"Pardon me, doctor, but I don't feel called upon to explain my official actions except to the proper authorities."

Macphail looked at him shrewdly. He remembered Davidson's hint that he had used threats, and in the governor's attitude he read a singular embarrassment.

"Davidson's a damned busybody," he said hotly.

"Between ourselves, Dr. Macphail, I don't say that I have formed a very favourable opinion of Mr. Davidson, but I am bound to confess that he was within his rights in pointing out to me the danger that the presence of a woman of Miss Thompson's character was to a place like this where a number of enlisted men are stationed among a native population."

He got up and Dr. Macphail was obliged to do so too.

"I must ask you to excuse me. I have an engagement. Please give my respects to Mrs. Macphail."

The doctor left him crest-fallen. He knew that Miss Thompson would be waiting for him, and unwilling to tell her himself that he had failed, he went into the house by the back



door and sneaked up the stairs as though he had something to hide.

At supper he was silent and ill-at-ease, but the missionary was jovial and animated. Dr. Macphail thought his eyes rested on him now and then with triumphant good-humour. It struck him suddenly that Davidson knew of his visit to the governor and of its ill success. But how on earth could he have heard of it? There was something sinister about the power of that man. After supper he saw Horn on the verandah and, as though to have a casual word with him, went out.

"She wants to know if you've seen the governor," the trader whispered.

"Yes. He wouldn't do anything. I'm awfully sorry, I can't do anything more."

"I knew he wouldn't. They daren't go against the missionaries."

"What are you talking about?" said Davidson affably, coming out to join them.

"I was just saying there was no chance of your getting over to Apia for at least another week," said the trader glibly.

He left them, and the two men returned into the parlour. Mr. Davidson devoted one hour after each meal to recreation. Presently a timid knock was heard at the door.

"Come in," said Mrs. Davidson, in her sharp voice.

The door was not opened. She got up and opened it. They saw Miss Thompson standing at the threshold. But the change in her appearance was extraordinary. This was no longer the flaunting hussy who had jeered at them in the road, but a broken, frightened woman. Her hair, as a rule so elaborately arranged, was tumbling untidily over her neck. She wore bedroom slippers and a skirt and blouse. They were unfresh

and bedraggled. She stood at the door with the tears streaming down her face and did not dare to enter.

"What do you want?" said Mrs. Davidson harshly.

"May I speak to Mr. Davidson?" she said in a choking voice.

The missionary rose and went towards her.

"Come right in, Miss Thompson," he said in cordial tones.

"What can I do for you?"

She entered the room.

"Say, I'm sorry for what I said to you the other day an' for — for everythin' else. I guess I was a bit lit up. I beg pardon."

"Oh, it was nothing. I guess my back's broad enough to bear a few hard words."

She stepped towards him with a movement that was horribly cringing.

"You've got me beat. I'm all in. You won't make me go back to 'Frisco?"

His genial manner vanished and his voice grew on a sudden hard and stern.

"Why don't you want to go back there?"

She cowered before him.

"I guess my people live there. I don't want them to see me like this. I'll go anywhere else you say."

"Why don't you want to go back to San Francisco?"

"I've told you."

He leaned forward, staring at her, and his great, shining eyes seemed to try to bore into her soul. He gave a sudden gasp.

"The penitentiary."

She screamed, and then she fell at his feet, clasping his legs.

"Don't send me back there. I swear to you before God I'll be a good woman. I'll give all this up."

She burst into a torrent of confused supplication and the tears coursed down her painted cheeks. He leaned over her and, lifting her face, forced her to look at him.

"Is that it, the penitentiary?"

"I beat it before they could get me," she gasped. "If the bulls grab me it's three years for mine."

He let go his hold of her and she fell in a heap on the floor, sobbing bitterly. Dr. Macphail stood up.

"This alters the whole thing," he said. "You can't make her go back when you know this. Give her another chance. She wants to turn over a new leaf."

"I'm going to give her the finest chance she's ever had. If she repents let her accept her punishment."

She misunderstood the words and looked up. There was a gleam of hope in her heavy eyes.

"You'll let me go?"

"No. You shall sail for San Francisco on Tuesday."

She gave a groan of horror and then burst into low, hoarse shrieks which sounded hardly human, and she beat her head passionately on the ground. Dr. Macphail sprang to her and lifted her up.

"Come on, you mustn't do that. You'd better go to your room and lie down. I'll get you something."

He raised her to her feet and partly dragging her, partly carrying her, got her downstairs. He was furious with Mrs. Davidson and with his wife because they made no effort to help. The half-caste was standing on the landing and with his assistance he managed to get her on the bed. She was moaning and crying. She was almost insensible. He gave her a hypodermic injection. He was hot and exhausted when he went upstairs again.

"I've got her to lie down."

The two women and Davidson were in the same positions as when he had left them. They could not have moved or spoken since he went.

"I was waiting for you," said Davidson, in a strange, distant voice. "I want you all to pray with me for the soul of our erring sister."

He took the Bible off a shelf, and sat down at the table at which they had supped. It had not been cleared, and he pushed the tea-pot out of the way. In a powerful voice, resonant and deep, he read to them the chapter in which is narrated the meeting of Jesus Christ with the woman taken in adultery.

"Now kneel with me and let us pray for the soul of our dear sister, Sadie Thompson."

He burst into a long, passionate prayer in which he implored God to have mercy on the sinful woman. Mrs. Macphail and Mrs. Davidson knelt with covered eyes. The doctor, taken by surprise, awkward and sheepish, knelt too. The missionary's prayer had a savage eloquence. He was extraordinarily moved, and as he spoke the tears ran down his cheeks. Outside, the pitiless rain fell, fell steadily, with a fierce malignity that was all too human.

At last he stopped. He paused for a moment and said:

"We will now repeat the Lord's prayer."

They said it and then, following him, they rose from their knees. Mrs. Davidson's face was pale and restful. She was comforted and at peace, but the Macphails felt suddenly bashful. They did not know which way to look.

"I'll just go down and see how she is now," said Dr. Macphail.

When he knocked at her door it was opened for him by Horn. Miss Thompson was in a rocking-chair, sobbing quietly.

"What are you doing there?" exclaimed Macphail. "I told you to lie down."

"I can't lie down. I want to see Mr. Davidson."

"My poor child, what do you think is the good of it? You'll never move him."

"He said he'd come if I sent for him."

Macphail motioned to the trader.

"Go and fetch him."

He waited with her in silence while the trader went upstairs. Davidson came in.

"Excuse me for asking you to come here," she said, looking at him sombrely.

"I was expecting you to send for me. I knew the Lord would answer my prayer."

They stared at one another for a moment and then she looked away. She kept her eyes averted when she spoke.

"I've been a bad woman. I want to repent."

"Thank God! thank God! He has heard our prayers."

He turned to the two men.

"Leave me alone with her. Tell Mrs. Davidson that our prayers have been answered."

They went out and closed the door behind them.

"Gee whizz," said the trader.

That night Dr. Macphail could not get to sleep till late, and when he heard the missionary come upstairs he looked at his watch. It was two o'clock. But even then he did not go to bed at once, for through the wooden partition that separated their rooms he heard him praying aloud, till he himself, exhausted, fell asleep.

When he saw him next morning he was surprised at his appearance. He was paler than ever, tired, but his eyes shone with an inhuman fire. It looked as though he were filled with an overwhelming joy.



"I want you to go down presently and see Sadie," he said. "I can't hope that her body is better, but her soul — her soul is transformed."

The doctor was feeling wan and nervous.

"You were with her very late last night," he said.

"Yes, she couldn't bear to have me leave her."

"You look as pleased as Punch," the doctor said irritably.

Davidson's eyes shone with ecstasy.

"A great mercy has been vouchsafed me. Last night I was privileged to bring a lost soul to the loving arms of Jesus."

Miss Thompson was again in the rocking-chair. The bed had not been made. The room was in disorder. She had not troubled to dress herself, but wore a dirty dressing-gown, and her hair was tied in a sluttish knot. She had given her face a dab with a wet towel, but it was all swollen and creased with crying. She looked a drab.

She raised her eyes dully when the doctor came in. She was cowed and broken.

"Where's Mr. Davidson?" she asked.

"He'll come presently if you want him," answered Macphail acidly. "I came here to see how you were."

"Oh, I guess I'm O. K. You needn't worry about that."

"Have you had anything to eat?"

"Horn brought me some coffee."

She looked anxiously at the door.

"D'you think he'll come down soon? I feel as if it wasn't so terrible when he's with me."

"Are you still going on Tuesday?"

"Yes, he says I've got to go. Please tell him to come right along. You can't do me any good. He's the only one as can help me now."

"Very well," said Dr. Macphail.

During the next three days the missionary spent almost all his time with Sadie Thompson. He joined the others only to have his meals. Dr. Macphail noticed that he hardly ate.

"He's wearing himself out," said Mrs. Davidson pitifully. "He'll have a breakdown if he doesn't take care, but he won't spare himself."

She herself was white and pale. She told Mrs. Macphail that she had no sleep. When the missionary came upstairs from Miss Thompson he prayed till he was exhausted, but even then he did not sleep for long. After an hour or two he got up and dressed himself, and went for a tramp along the bay. He had strange dreams.

"This morning he told me that he'd been dreaming about the mountains of Nebraska," said Mrs. Davidson.

"That's curious," said Dr. Macphail.

He remembered seeing them from the windows of the train when he crossed America. They were like huge mole-hills, rounded and smooth, and they rose from the plain abruptly. Dr. Macphail remembered how it struck him that they were like a woman's breasts.

Davidson's restlessness was intolerable even to himself. But he was buoyed up by a wonderful exhilaration. He was tearing out by the roots the last vestiges of sin that lurked in the hidden corners of that poor woman's heart. He read with her and prayed with her.

"It's wonderful," he said to them one day at supper. "It's a true rebirth. Her soul, which was black as night, is now pure and white like the new-fallen snow. I am humble and afraid. Her remorse for all her sins is beautiful. I am not worthy to touch the hem of her garment."

"Have you the heart to send her back to San Francisco?"

said the doctor. "Three years in an American prison. I should have thought you might have saved her from that."

"Ah, but don't you see? It's necessary. Do you think my heart doesn't bleed for her? I love her as I love my wife and my sister. All the time that she is in prison I shall suffer all the pain that she suffers."

"Bunkum," cried the doctor impatiently.

"You don't understand because you're blind. She's sinned, and she must suffer. I know what she'll endure. She'll be starved and tortured and humiliated. I want her to accept the punishment of man as a sacrifice to God. I want her to accept it joyfully. She has an opportunity which is offered to very few of us. God is very good and very merciful."

Davidson's voice trembled with excitement. He could hardly articulate the words that tumbled passionately from his lips.

"All day I pray with her and when I leave her I pray again, I pray with all my might and main, so that Jesus may grant her this great mercy. I want to put in her heart the passionate desire to be punished so that at the end, even if I offered to let her go, she would refuse. I want her to feel that the bitter punishment of prison is the thank-offering that she places at the feet of our Blessed Lord, who gave his life for her."

The days passed slowly. The whole household, intent on the wretched, tortured woman downstairs, lived in a state of unnatural excitement. She was like a victim that was being prepared for the savage rites of a bloody idolatry. Her terror numbed her. She could not bear to let Davidson out of her sight; it was only when he was with her that she had courage, and she hung upon him with a slavish dependence. She cried a great deal, and she read the Bible, and prayed. Sometimes she was exhausted and apathetic. Then she did indeed look forward to her ordeal, for it seemed to offer an escape, direct

and concrete, from the anguish she was enduring. She could not bear much longer the vague terrors which now assailed her. With her sins she had put aside all personal vanity, and she slopped about her room, unkempt and dishevelled, in her tawdry dressing-gown. She had not taken off her night-dress for four days, nor put on stockings. Her room was littered and untidy. Meanwhile the rain fell with a cruel persistence. You felt that the heavens must at last be empty of water, but still it poured down, straight and heavy, with a maddening iteration, on the iron roof. Everything was damp and clammy. There was mildew on the walls and on the boots that stood on the floor. Through the sleepless nights the mosquitoes droned their angry chant.

"If it would only stop raining for a single day it wouldn't be so bad," said Dr. Macphail.

They all looked forward to the Tuesday when the boat for San Francisco was to arrive from Sydney. The strain was intolerable. So far as Dr. Macphail was concerned, his pity and his resentment were alike extinguished by his desire to be rid of the unfortunate woman. The inevitable must be accepted. He felt he would breathe more freely when the ship had sailed. Sadie Thompson was to be escorted on board by a clerk in the governor's office. This person called on the Monday evening and told Miss Thompson to be prepared at eleven in the morning. Davidson was with her.

"I'll see that everything is ready. I mean to come on board with her myself."

Miss Thompson did not speak.

When Dr. Macphail blew out his candle and crawled cautiously under his mosquito curtains, he gave a sigh of relief.

"Well, thank God that's over. By this time to-morrow she'll be gone."

"Mrs. Davidson will be glad too. She says he's wearing himself to a shadow," said Mrs. Macphail. "She's a different woman."

"Who?"

"Sadie. I should never have thought it possible. It makes one humble."

Dr. Macphail did not answer, and presently he fell asleep. He was tired out, and he slept more soundly than usual.

He was awakened in the morning by a hand placed on his arm, and, starting up, saw Horn by the side of his bed. The trader put his finger on his mouth to prevent any exclamation from Dr. Macphail and beckoned to him to come. As a rule he wore shabby ducks, but now he was barefoot and wore only the *lava-lava* of the natives. He looked suddenly savage, and Dr. Macphail, getting out of bed, saw that he was heavily tattooed. Horn made him a sign to come on to the verandah. Dr. Macphail got out of bed and followed the trader out.

"Don't make a noise," he whispered. "You're wanted. Put on a coat and some shoes. Quick."

Dr. Macphail's first thought was that something had happened to Miss Thompson.

"What is it? Shall I bring my instruments?"

"Hurry, please, hurry."

Dr. Macphail crept back into the bedroom, put on a waterproof over his pyjamas, and a pair of rubber-soled shoes. He rejoined the trader, and together they tiptoed down the stairs. The door leading out to the road was open and at it were standing half a dozen natives.

"What is it?" repeated the doctor.

"Come along with me," said Horn.

He walked out and the doctor followed him. The natives came after them in a little bunch. They crossed the road and



came on to the beach. The doctor saw a group of natives standing round some object at the water's edge. They hurried along, a couple of dozen yards perhaps, and the natives opened out as the doctor came up. The trader pushed him forwards. Then he saw, lying half in the water and half out, a dreadful object, the body of Davidson. Dr. Macphail bent down — he was not a man to lose his head in an emergency — and turned the body over. The throat was cut from ear to ear, and in the right hand was still the razor with which the deed was done.

"He's quite cold," said the doctor. "He must have been dead some time."

"One of the boys saw him lying there on his way to work just now and came and told me. Do you think he did it himself?"

"Yes. Someone ought to go for the police."

Horn said something in the native tongue, and two youths started off.

"We must leave him here till they come," said the doctor.

"They mustn't take him into my house. I won't have him in my house."

"You'll do what the authorities say," replied the doctor sharply. "In point of fact I expect they'll take him to the mortuary."

They stood waiting where they were. The trader took a cigarette from a fold in his *lava-lava* and gave one to Dr. Macphail. They smoked while they stared at the corpse. Dr. Macphail could not understand.

"Why do you think he did it?" asked Horn.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. In a little while native police came along, under the charge of a marine, with a stretcher, and immediately afterwards a couple of naval officers

and a naval doctor. They managed everything in a business-like manner.

"What about the wife?" said one of the officers.

"Now that you've come I'll go back to the house and get some things on. I'll see that it's broken to her. She'd better not see him till he's been fixed up a little."

"I guess that's right," said the naval doctor.

When Dr. Macphail went back he found his wife nearly dressed.

"Mrs. Davidson's in a dreadful state about her husband," she said to him as soon as he appeared. "He hasn't been to bed all night. She heard him leave Miss Thompson's room at two, but he went out. If he's been walking about since then he'll be absolutely dead."

Dr. Macphail told her what had happened and asked her to break the news to Mrs. Davidson.

"But why did he do it?" she asked, horror-stricken.

"I don't know."

"But I can't. I can't."

"You must."

She gave him a frightened look and went out. He heard her go into Mrs. Davidson's room. He waited a minute to gather himself together and then began to shave and wash. When he was dressed he sat down on the bed and waited for his wife. At last she came.

"She wants to see him," she said.

"They've taken him to the mortuary. We'd better go down with her. How did she take it?"

"I think she's stunned. She didn't cry. But she's trembling like a leaf."

"We'd better go at once."

When they knocked at her door Mrs. Davidson came out.

She was very pale, but dry-eyed. To the doctor she seemed unnaturally composed. No word was exchanged, and they set out in silence down the road. When they arrived at the mortuary Mrs. Davidson spoke.

"Let me go in and see him alone."

They stood aside. A native opened a door for her and closed it behind her. They sat down and waited. One or two white men came and talked to them in undertones. Dr. Macphail told them again what he knew of the tragedy. At last the door was quietly opened and Mrs. Davidson came out. Silence fell upon them.

"I'm ready to go back now," she said.

Her voice was hard and steady. Dr. Macphail could not understand the look in her eyes. Her pale face was very stern. They walked back slowly, never saying a word, and at last they came round the bend on the other side of which stood their house. Mrs. Davidson gave a gasp, and for a moment they stopped still. An incredible sound assaulted their ears. The gramophone which had been silent for so long was playing, playing ragtime loud and harsh.

"What's that?" cried Mrs. Macphail with horror.

"Let's go on," said Mrs. Davidson.

They walked up the steps and entered the hall. Miss Thompson was standing at her door, chatting with a sailor. A sudden change had taken place in her. She was no longer the cowed drudge of the last days. She was dressed in all her finery, in her white dress, with the high shiny boots over which her fat legs bulged in their cotton stockings; her hair was elaborately arranged; and she wore that enormous hat covered with gaudy flowers. Her face was painted, her eyebrows were boldly black, and her lips were scarlet. She held herself erect. She was the flaunting quean that they had

known at first. As they came in she broke into a loud, jeering laugh; and then, when Mrs. Davidson involuntarily stopped, she collected the spittle in her mouth and spat. Mrs. Davidson cowered back, and two red spots rose suddenly to her cheeks. Then, covering her face with her hands, she broke away and ran quickly up the stairs. Dr. Macphail was outraged. He pushed past the woman into her room.

"What the devil are you doing?" he cried. "Stop that damned machine."

He went up to it and tore the record off. She turned on him.

"Say, doc, you can that stuff with me. What the hell are you doin' in my room?"

"What do you mean?" he cried. "What d'you mean?"

She gathered herself together. No one could describe the scorn of her expression or the contemptuous hatred she put into her answer.

"You men! You filthy, dirty pigs! You're all the same, all of you. Pigs! Pigs!"

Dr. Macphail gasped. He understood.

## THE WOMAN AT SEVEN BROTHERS <sup>1</sup>

By WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

I TELL you sir, I was innocent. I didn't know any more about the world at twenty-two than some do at twelve. My uncle and aunt in Duxbury brought me up strict; I studied hard in high school, I worked hard after hours, and I went to church twice on Sundays, and I can't see it's right to put me in a place like this, with crazy people. Oh yes, I know they're crazy — you can't tell *me*. As for what they said in court about finding her with her husband, that's the Inspector's lie, sir, because he's down on me, and wants to make it look like my fault.

No, sir, I can't say as I thought she was handsome — not at first. For one thing, her lips were too thin and white, and her color was bad. I'll tell you a fact, sir; that first day I came off to the Light I was sitting on my cot in the store-room (that's where the assistant keeper sleeps at the Seven Brothers), as lonesome as I could be, away from home for the first time and the water all around me, and, even though it was a calm day, pounding enough on the ledge to send a kind of a *woom-woom-woom* whining up through all that solid rock of the tower. And when old Fedderson poked his head down from the living-room with the sunshine above making a kind of bright frame around his hair and whiskers, to give me a cheery, "Make yourself to home, son!" I remember I said to myself: "*He's* all right. I'll get along with *him*. But his wife's enough to sour milk." That was queer, because she was so much under him in age —

<sup>1</sup> From "Land's End and Other Stories," by Wilbur Daniel Steele. Copyright, 1918, by Harper & Brothers. By special permission.



'long about twenty-eight or so, and him nearer fifty. But that's what I said, sir.

Of course that feeling wore off, same as any feeling will wear off sooner or later in a place like the Seven Brothers. Cooped up in a place like that you come to know folks so well that you forget what they *do* look like. There was a long time I never noticed her, any more than you'd notice the cat. We used to sit of an evening around the table, as if you were Fedderson there, and me here, and her somewhere back there, in the rocker, knitting. Fedderson would be working on his Jacob's-ladder, and I'd be reading. He'd been working on that Jacob's-ladder a year, I guess, and every time the Inspector came off with the tender he was so astonished to see how good that ladder was that the old man would go to work and make it better. That's all he lived for.

If I was reading, as I say, I daren't take my eyes off the book, or Fedderson had me. And then he'd begin — what the Inspector said about him. How surprised the member of the board had been, that time, to see everything so clean about the light. What the Inspector had said about Fedderson's being stuck here in a second-class light — best keeper on the coast. And so on and so on, till either he or I had to go aloft and have a look at the wicks.

He's been there twenty-three years, all told, and he'd got used to the feeling that he was kept down unfair — so used to it, I guess, that he fed on it, and told himself how folks ashore would talk when he was dead and gone — best keeper on the coast — kept down unfair. Not that he said that to me. No, he was far too loyal and humble and respectful, doing his duty without complaint, as anybody could see.

And all that time, night after night, hardly ever a word out of the woman. As I remember it, she seemed more like a piece

of furniture than anything else — not even a very good cook, nor over and above tidy. One day, when he and I were trimming the lamp, he passed the remark that his *first* wife used to dust the lens and take a pride in it. Not that he said a word against Anna, though. He never said a word against any living mortal; he was too upright.

I don't know how it came about; or rather, I *do* know, but it was so sudden, and so far away from my thoughts, that it shocked me, like the world turned over. It was at prayers. That night I remember Fedderson was uncommon long-winded. We'd had a batch of newspapers out by the tender, and at such times the old man always made a long watch of it, getting the world straightened out. For one thing, the United States minister to Turkey was dead. Well, from him and his soul, Fedderson got on to Turkey and the Presbyterian college there, and from that to heathen in general. He rambled on and on, like the surf on the ledge, *woom-woom-woom*, never coming to an end.

You know how you'll be at prayers sometimes. My mind strayed. I counted the canes in the chair-seat where I was kneeling; I plaited a corner of the table-cloth between my fingers for a spell, and by and by my eyes went wandering up the back of the chair.

The woman, sir, was looking at me. Her chair was back to mine, close, and both our heads were down in the shadow under the edge of the table, with Fedderson clear over on the other side by the stove. And there were her two eyes hunting mine between the spindles in the shadow. You won't believe me, sir, but I tell you I felt like jumping to my feet and running out of the room — it was so queer.

I don't know what her husband was praying about after that. His voice didn't mean anything, no more than the seas on the

ledge away down there. I went to work to count the canes in the seat again, but all my eyes were in the top of my head. It got so I couldn't stand it. We were at the Lord's prayer, saying it sing-song together, when I had to look up again. And there her two eyes were, between the spindles, hunting mine. Just then all of us were saying, "Forgive us our trespasses — " I thought of it afterward.

When we got up she was turned the other way, but I couldn't help seeing her cheeks were red. It was terrible. I wondered if Fedderson would notice, though I might have known he wouldn't — not him. He was in too much of a hurry to get at his Jacob's-ladder, and then he had to tell me for the tenth time what the Inspector'd said that day about getting him another light — Kingdom Come, maybe, he said.

I made some excuse or other and got away. Once in the store-room, I sat down on my cot and stayed there a long time, feeling queerer than anything. I read a chapter in the Bible, I don't know why. After I'd got my boots off I sat with them in my hands for as much as an hour, I guess, staring at the oil-tank and its lop-sided shadow on the wall. I tell you, sir, I was shocked. I was only twenty-two remember, and I was shocked and horrified.

And when I did turn in, finally, I didn't sleep at all well. Two or three times I came to, sitting straight up in bed. Once I got up and opened the outer door to have a look. The water was like glass, dim, without a breath of wind, and the moon just going down. Over on the black shore I made out two lights in a village, like a pair of eyes watching. Lonely? My, yes! Lonely and nervous. I had a horror of her, sir. The dinghy-boat hung on its davits just there in front of the door, and for a moment I had an awful hankering to climb into it, lower away, and row off, no matter where. It sounds foolish.

Well, it seemed foolish next morning, with the sun shining and everything as usual — Fedderson sucking his pen and wagging his head over his eternal “log,” and his wife down in the rocker with her head in the newspaper, and her breakfast work still waiting. I guess that jarred it out of me more than anything else — sight of her slouched down there, with her stringy, yellow hair and her dusty apron and the pale back of her neck, reading the Society Notes. *Society Notes!* Think of it! For the first time since I came to Seven Brothers I wanted to laugh.

I guess I did laugh when I went aloft to clean the lamp and found everything so free and breezy, gulls flying high and little whitecaps making under a westerly. It was like feeling a big load dropped off your shoulders. Fedderson came up with his dust-rag and cocked his head at me.

“What’s the matter, Ray?” said he.

“Nothing,” said I. And then I couldn’t help it. “Seems kind of out of place for society notes,” said I, “out here at Seven Brothers.”

He was on the other side of the lens, and when he looked at me he had a thousand eyes, all sober. For a minute I thought he was going on dusting, but then he came out and sat down on a sill.

“Sometimes,” said he, “I get to thinking it may be a mite dull for her here. She’s pretty young, Ray. Not much more’n a girl, hardly.”

“Not much more’n a *girl!*” It gave me a turn, sir, as though I’d seen my aunt in short dresses.

“It’s a good home for her, though,” he went on slow. “I’ve seen a lot worse ashore, Ray. Of course if I could get a shore light — ”

“Kingdom Come’s a shore light.”

He looked at me out of his deep-set eyes, and then he turned them around the light-room, where he'd been so long.

"No," said he, wagging his head. "It ain't for such as me." I never saw so humble a man.

"But look here," he went on, more cheerful. "As I was telling her just now, a month from yesterday's our fourth anniversary, and I'm going to take her ashore for the day and give her a holiday — new hat and everything. A girl wants a mite of excitement now and then, Ray."

There it was again, that "girl." It gave me the fidgets, sir. I had to do something about it. It's close quarters for last names in a light, and I'd taken to calling him Uncle Matt soon after I came. Now, when I was at table that noon, I spoke over to where she was standing by the stove, getting him another help of chowder.

"I guess I'll have some, too, *Aunt Anna*," said I, matter of fact.

She never said a word nor gave a sign — just stood there kind of round-shouldered, dipping the chowder. And that night at prayers I hitched my chair around the table, with its back the other way.

You get awful lazy in a lighthouse, some ways. No matter how much tinkering you've got, there's still a lot of time and there's such a thing as too much reading. The changes in weather get monotonous, too, by and by; the light burns the same on a thick night as it does on a fair one. Of course there's the ships, north-bound, south-bound — wind-jammers, freighters, passenger-boats full of people. In the watches at night you can see their lights go by, and wonder what they are, how they're laden, where they'll fetch up, and all. I used to do that almost every evening when it was my first watch, sitting out on the walk-around up there with my legs hanging over



the edge and my chin propped on the railing — lazy. The Boston boat was the prettiest to see, with her three tiers of port-holes lit, like a string of pearls wrapped round and round a woman's neck — well away, too, for the ledge must have made a couple of hundred fathoms off the Light, like a white dog-tooth of a breaker, even on the darkest night.

Well, I was lolling there one night, as I say, watching the Boston boat go by, not thinking of anything special, when I heard the door on the other side of the tower open and footsteps coming around to me.

By and by I nodded toward the boat and passed the remark that she was fetching in uncommon close to-night. No answer. I made nothing of that, for oftentimes Fedderson wouldn't answer, and after I'd watched the lights crawling on through the dark a spell, just to make conversation I said I guessed there'd be a bit of weather before long.

"I've noticed," said I, "when there's weather coming on, and the wind in the northeast, you can hear the orchestra playing aboard of her just over there. I make it out now. Do you?"

"Yes. Oh — yes! *I hear it all right!*"

You can imagine I started. It wasn't him, but *her*. And there was something in the way she said that speech, sir — something — well — unnatural. Like a hungry animal snapping at a person's hand.

I turned and looked at her sidewise. She was standing by the railing, leaning a little outward, the top of her from the waist picked out bright by the lens behind her. I didn't know what in the world to say, and yet I had a feeling I ought not to sit there mum.

"I wonder," said I, "what that captain's thinking of, fetching in so handy to-night. It's no way. I tell you, if it wasn't

for this light, she'd go to work and pile up on the ledge some thick night — ”

She turned at that and stared straight into the lens. I didn't like the look of her face. Somehow, with its edges cut hard all around and its two eyes closed down to slits, like a cat's, it made a kind of mask.

“And then,” I went on, uneasy enough — “and then where'd all their music be of a sudden, and their goings-on and their singing — ”

“And dancing!” She clipped me off so quick it took my breath.

“D-d-dancing?” said I.

“That's dance-music,” said she. She was looking at the boat again.

“How do you know?” I felt I had to keep on talking.

Well, sir — she laughed. I looked at her. She had on a shawl of some stuff or other that shined in the light; she had it pulled tight around her with her two hands in front at her breast, and I saw her shoulders swaying in tune.

“How do I *know*?” she cried. Then she laughed again, the same kind of a laugh. It was queer, sir, to see her, and to hear her. She turned, as quick as that, and leaned toward me. “Don't you know how to dance, Ray?” said she.

“N-no,” I managed, and I was going to say “*Aunt Anna*,” but the thing choked in my throat. I tell you she was looking square at me all the time with her two eyes and moving with the music as if she didn't know it. By heavens, sir, it came over me of a sudden that she wasn't so bad-looking, after all. I guess I must have sounded like a fool.

“You — you see,” said I, “she's cleared the rip there now, and the music's gone. You — you — hear?”

“Yes,” said she, turning back slow. “That's where it stops

every night — night after night — it stops just there — at the rip.”

When she spoke again her voice was different. I never heard the like of it, thin and taut as a thread. It made me shiver, sir.

“I hate ‘em!” That’s what she said. “I hate ‘em all. I’d like to see ‘em dead. I’d love to see ‘em torn apart on the rocks night after night. I could bathe my hands in their blood, night after night.”

And do you know, sir, I saw it with my own eyes, her hands moving in each other above the rail. But it was her voice, though. I didn’t know what to do, or what to say, so I poked my head through the railing and looked down at the water. I don’t think I’m a coward, sir, but it was like a cold — ice-cold — hand, taking hold of my beating heart.

When I looked up finally, she was gone. By and by I went in and had a look at the lamp, hardly knowing what I was about. Then, seeing by my watch it was time for the old man to come on duty, I started to go below. In the Seven Brothers, you understand, the stair goes down in a spiral through a well against the south wall, and first there’s the door to the keeper’s room, and then you come to another, and that’s the living-room, and then down to the store-room. And at night, if you don’t carry a lantern, it’s as black as the pit.

Well, down I went, sliding my hand along the rail, and as usual I stopped to give a rap on the keeper’s door, in case he was taking a nap after supper. Sometimes he did.

I stood there, blind as a bat, with my mind still up on the walk-around. There was no answer to my knock. I hadn’t expected any. Just from habit, and with my right foot already hanging down for the next step, I reached out to give the door one more tap for luck.

Do you know, sir, my hand didn’t fetch up on anything.

The door had been there a second before, and now the door wasn't there. My hand just went on going through the dark, on and on, and I didn't seem to have sense or power enough to stop it. There didn't seem any air in the well to breathe, and my ears were drumming to the surf — that's how scared I was. And then my hand touched the flesh of a face, and something in the dark said, "Oh!" no louder than a sigh.

Next thing I knew, sir, I was down in the living-room, warm and yellow-lit, with Fedderson cocking his head at me across the table, where he was at that eternal Jacob's-ladder of his.

"What's the matter, Ray?" said he. "Lord's sake, Ray!"

"Nothing," said I. Then I think I told him I was sick. That night I wrote a letter to A. L. Peters, the grain-dealer in Duxbury, asking for a job — even though it wouldn't go ashore for a couple of weeks, just the writing of it made me feel better.

It's hard to tell you how those two weeks went by. I don't know why, but I felt like hiding in a corner all the time. I had to come to meals. But I didn't look at her, though, not once, unless it was by accident. Fedderson thought I was still ailing and nagged me to death with advice and so on. One thing I took care not to do, I can tell you, and that was to knock on his door till I'd made certain he wasn't below in the living-room — though I was tempted to.

Yes, sir; that's a queer thing, and I wouldn't tell you if I hadn't set out to give you the truth. Night after night, stopping there on the landing in that black pit, the air gone out of my lungs and the surf drumming in my ears and sweat standing cold on my neck — and one hand lifting up in the air — God forgive me, sir! Maybe I did wrong not to look at her more, drooping about her work in her gingham apron, with her hair stringing.

When the Inspector came off with the tender, that time, I

told him I was through. That's when he took the dislike to me, I guess, for he looked at me kind of sneering and said, soft as I was, I'd have to put up with it till next relief. And then, said he, there'd be a whole house-cleaning at Seven Brothers, because he'd gotten Fedderson the berth at Kingdom Come. And with that he slapped the old man on the back.

I wish you could have seen Fedderson, sir. He sat down on my cot as if his knees had given 'way. Happy? You'd think he'd be happy, with all his dreams come true. Yes, he was happy, beaming all over — for a minute. Then, sir, he began to shrivel up. It was like seeing a man cut down in his prime before your eyes. He began to wag his head.

"No," said he. "No, no; it's not for such as me. I'm good enough for Seven Brothers, and that's all, Mr. Bayliss. That's all."

And for all the Inspector could say, that's what he stuck to. He'd figured himself a martyr so many years, nursed that injustice like a mother with her first-born, sir; and now in his old age, so to speak, they weren't to rob him of it. Fedderson was going to wear out his life in a second-class light, and folks would talk — that was his idea. I heard him hailing down as the tender was casting off:

"See you to-morrow, Mr. Bayliss. Yep. Coming ashore with the wife for a spree. Anniversary. Yep."

But he didn't sound much like a spree. They *had* robbed him, partly, after all. I wondered what *she* thought about it. I didn't know till night. She didn't show up to supper, which Fedderson and I got ourselves — had a headache, he said. It was my early watch. I went and lit up and came back to read a spell. He was finishing off the Jacob's-ladder, and thoughtful, like a man that's lost a treasure. Once or twice I caught him looking about the room on the sly. It was pathetic, sir.



Going up the second time, I stepped out on the walk-around to have a look at things. She was there on the seaward side, wrapped in that silky thing. A fair sea was running across the ledge and it was coming on a little thick — not too thick. Off to the right the Boston boat was blowing, *whroom-whroom!* Creeping up on us, quarter-speed. There was another fellow behind her, and a fisherman's conch farther offshore.

I don't know why, but I stopped beside her and leaned on the rail. She didn't appear to notice me, one way or another. We stood and we stood, listening to the whistles, and the longer we stood the more it got on my nerves, her not noticing me. I suppose she'd been too much on my mind lately. I began to be put out. I scraped my feet. I coughed. By and by I said out loud:

"Look here, I guess I better get out the fog-horn and give those fellows a toot."

"Why?" said she, without moving her head — calm as that.

"*Why?*" It gave me a turn, sir. For a minute I stared at her. "Why? Because if she doesn't pick up this light before very many minutes she'll be too close in to wear — tide'll have her on the rocks — that's why!"

I couldn't see her face, but I could see one of her silk shoulders lift a little, like a shrug. And there I kept on staring at her, a dumb one, sure enough. I know what brought me to was hearing the Boston boat's three sharp toots as she picked up the light — mad as anything — and swung her helm a-port. I turned away from her, sweat stringing down my face, and walked around to the door. It was just as well, too, for the feed-pipe was plugged in the lamp and the wicks were popping. She'd have been out in another five minutes, sir.

When I'd finished, I saw that woman standing in the door-

way. Her eyes were bright. I had a horror of her, sir, a living horror.

"If only the light had been out," said she, low and sweet.

"God forgive you," said I. "You don't know what you're saying."

She went down the stair into the well, winding out of sight, and as long as I could see her, her eyes were watching mine. When I went, myself, after a few minutes, she was waiting for me on that first landing, standing still in the dark. She took hold of my hand, though I tried to get it away.

"Good-by," said she in my ear.

"Good-by?" said I. I didn't understand.

"You heard what he said to-day — about Kingdom Come? Be it so — on his own head. I'll never come back here. Once I set foot ashore — I've got friends in Brightonboro, Ray."

I got away from her and started on down. But I stopped. "Brightonboro?" I whispered back. "Why do you tell *me*?" My throat was raw to the words, like a sore.

"So you'd know," said she.

Well, sir, I saw them off next morning, down that new Jacob's-ladder into the dinghy-boat, her in a dress of blue velvet and him in his best cutaway and derby — rowing away, smaller and smaller, the two of them. And then I went back and sat on my cot, leaving the door open and the ladder still hanging down the wall, along with the boat-falls.

I don't know whether it was relief, or what. I suppose I must have been worked up even more than I'd thought those past weeks, for now it was all over I was like a rag. I got down on my knees, sir, and prayed to God for the salvation of my soul, and when I got up and climbed to the living-room it was half past twelve by the clock. There was rain on the windows and

the sea was running blue-black under the sun. I'd sat there all that time not knowing there was a squall.

It was funny; the glass stood high, but those black squalls kept coming and going all afternoon, while I was at work up in the light-room. And I worked hard, to keep myself busy. First thing I knew it was five, and no sign of the boat yet. It began to get dim and kind of purplish-gray over the land. The sun was down. I lit up, made everything snug, and got out the night-glasses to have another look for that boat. He'd said he intended to get back before five. No sign. And then, standing there, it came over me that of course he wouldn't be coming off — he'd be hunting *her*, poor old fool. It looked like I had to stand two men's watches that night.

Never mind. I felt like myself again, even if I hadn't had any dinner or supper. Pride came to me that night on the walk-around, watching the boats go by — little boats, big boats, the Boston boat with all her pearls and her dance-music. They couldn't see me; they didn't know who I was; but to the last of them, they depended on *me*. They say a man must be born again. Well, I was born again. I breathed deep in the wind.

Dawn broke hard and red as a dying coal. I put out the light and started to go below. Born again; yes, sir. I felt so good I whistled in the well, and when I came to that first door on the stair I reached out in the dark to give it a rap for luck. And then, sir, the hair prickled all over my scalp, when I found my hand just going on and on through the air, the same as it had gone once before, and all of a sudden I wanted to yell, because I thought I was going to touch flesh. It's funny what their just forgetting to close their door did to me, isn't it?

Well, I reached for the latch and pulled it to with a bang and ran down as if a ghost was after me. I got up some coffee

and bread and bacon for breakfast. I drank the coffee. But somehow I couldn't eat, all along of that open door. The light in the room was blood. I got to thinking. I thought how she'd talked about those men, women, and children on the rocks, and how she'd made to bathe her hands over the rail. I almost jumped out of my chair then: it seemed for a wink she was there beside the stove watching me with that queer half-smile — really, I seemed to see her for a flash across the red table-cloth in the red light of dawn.

“Look here!” said I to myself, sharp enough; and then I gave myself a good laugh and went below. There I took a look out of the door, which was still open, with the ladder hanging down. I made sure to see the poor old fool come pulling around the point before very long now.

My boots were hurting a little, and, taking them off, I lay down on the cot to rest, and somehow I went to sleep. I had horrible dreams. I saw her again standing in that blood-red kitchen, and she seemed to be washing her hands, and the surf on the ledge was whining up the tower, louder and louder all the time, and what it whined was, “Night after night — night after night.” What woke me was cold water in my face.

The store-room was in gloom. That scared me at first; I thought night had come, and remembered the light. But then I saw the gloom was of a storm. The floor was shining wet, and the water in my face was spray, flung up through the open door. When I ran to close it it almost made me dizzy to see the gray-and-white breakers marching past. The land was gone; the sky shut down heavy overhead; there was a piece of wreckage on the back of a swell, and the Jacob's-ladder was carried clean away. How that sea had picked up so quick I can't think. I looked at my watch and it wasn't four in the afternoon yet.

When I closed the door, sir, it was almost dark in the store-room. I'd never been in the Light before in a gale of wind. I wondered why I was shivering so, till I found it was the floor below me shivering, and the walls and stair. Horrible crunchings and grindings ran away up the tower, and now and then there was a great thud somewhere, like a cannon-shot in a cave. I tell you, sir, I was alone, and I was in a mortal fright for a minute or so. And yet I had to get myself together. There was the light up there not tended to, and an early dark coming on and a heavy night and all, and I had to go. And I had to pass that door.

You'll say it's foolish, sir, and maybe it *was* foolish. Maybe it was because I hadn't eaten. But I began thinking of that door up there the minute I set foot on the stair, and all the way up through that howling dark well I dreaded to pass it. I told myself I wouldn't stop. I didn't stop. I felt the landing underfoot and I went on, four steps, five — and then I couldn't. I turned and went back. I put out my hand and it went on into nothing. That door, sir, was open again.

I left it be; I went on up to the light-room and set to work. It was Bedlam there, sir, screeching Bedlam, but I took no notice. I kept my eyes down. I trimmed those seven wicks, sir, as neat as ever they were trimmed; I polished the brass till it shone, and I dusted the lens. It wasn't till that was done that I let myself look back to see who it was standing there, half out of sight in the well. It was her, sir.

"Where'd you come from?" I asked. I remember my voice was sharp.

"Up Jacob's-ladder," said she, and hers was like the syrup of flowers.

I shook my head. I was savage, sir. "The ladder's carried away."



"I cast it off," said she, with a smile.

"Then," said I, "you must have come while I was asleep." Another thought came on me heavy as a ton of lead. "And where's *he*?" said I. "Where's the boat?"

"He's drowned," said she, as easy as that. "And I let the boat go adrift. You wouldn't hear me when I called."

"But look here," said I. "If you came through the store-room, why didn't you wake me up? Tell me that!" It sounds foolish enough, me standing like a lawyer in court, trying to prove she *couldn't* be there.

She didn't answer for a moment. I guess she sighed, though I couldn't hear for the gale, and her eyes grew soft, sir, so soft.

"I couldn't," said she. "You looked so peaceful — dear one."

My cheeks and neck went hot, sir, as if a warm iron was laid on them. I didn't know what to say. I began to stammer, "What do you mean —" but she was going back down the stair, out of sight. My God! sir, and I used not to think she was good-looking!

I started to follow her. I wanted to know what she meant. Then I said to myself, "If I don't go — if I wait here — she'll come back." And I went to the weather side and stood looking out of the window. Not that there was much to see. It was growing dark, and the Seven Brothers looked like the mane of a running horse, a great, vast, white horse running into the wind. The air was a-welter with it. I caught one peep of a fisherman, lying down flat trying to weather the ledge, and I said, "God help them all to-night," and then I went hot at sound of that "God."

I was right about her, though. She was back again. I wanted her to speak first, before I turned, but she wouldn't. I didn't hear her go out; I didn't know what she was up to

till I saw her coming outside on the walk-around, drenched wet already. I pounded on the glass for her to come in and not be a fool; if she heard she gave no sign of it.

There she stood, and there I stood watching her. Lord, sir — was it just that I'd never had eyes to see? Or are there women who bloom? Her clothes were shining on her, like a carving, and her hair was let down like a golden curtain tossing and streaming in the gale, and there she stood with her lips half open, drinking, and her eyes half closed, gazing straight away over the Seven Brothers, and her shoulders swaying, as if in tune with the wind and water and all the ruin. And when I looked at her hands over the rail, sir, they were moving in each other as if they bathed, and then I remembered, sir.

A cold horror took me. I knew now why she had come back again. She wasn't a woman — she was a devil. I turned my back on her. I said to myself: "It's time to light up. You've got to light up" — like that, over and over, out loud. My hand was shivering so I could hardly find a match; and when I scratched it, it only flared a second and then went out in the back draught from the open door. She was standing in the doorway, looking at me. It's queer, sir, but I felt like a child caught in mischief.

"I — I — was going to light up," I managed to say, finally.

"Why?" said she. No, I can't say it as she did.

"*Why?*" said I. "*My God!*"

She came nearer, laughing, as if with pity, low, you know. "Your God? And who is your God? What is God? What is anything on a night like this?"

I drew back from her. All I could say anything about was the light.

"Why not the dark?" said she. "Dark is softer than light — tenderer — dearer than light. From the dark up here, away

up here in the wind and storm, we can watch the ships go by, you and I. And you love me so. You've loved me so long, Ray."

"I never have!" I struck out at her. "I don't! I don't!"

Her voice was lower than ever, but there was the same laughing pity in it. "Oh yes, you have." And she was near me again.

"I have?" I yelled. "I'll show you! I'll show you if I have!"

I got another match, sir, and scratched it on the brass. I gave it to the first wick, the little wick that's inside all the others. It bloomed like a yellow flower. "I *have?*" I yelled, and gave it to the next.

Then there was a shadow, and I saw she was leaning beside me, her two elbows on the brass, her two arms stretched out above the wicks, her bare forearms and wrists and hands. I gave a gasp:

"Take care! You'll burn them! For God's sake — "

She didn't move or speak. The match burned my fingers and went out, and all I could do was stare at those arms of hers, helpless. I'd never noticed her arms before. They were rounded and graceful and covered with a soft down, like a breath of gold. Then I heard her speaking, close to my ear:

"Pretty arms," she said. "Pretty arms!"

I turned. Her eyes were fixed on mine. They seemed heavy, as if with sleep, and yet between their lids they were two wells, deep and deep, and as if they held all the things I'd ever thought or dreamed in them. I looked away from them, at her lips. Her lips were red as poppies, heavy with redness. They moved, and I heard them speaking:

"Poor boy, you love me so, and you want to kiss me — don't you?"

"No," said I. But I couldn't turn around. I looked at her

hair. I'd always thought it was stringy hair. Some hair curls naturally with damp, they say, and perhaps that was it, for there were pearls of wet on it, and it was thick and shimmering around her face, making soft shadows by the temples. There was green in it, queer strands of green like braids.

"What is it?" said I.

"Nothing but weed," said she, with that slow sleepy smile.

Somehow or other I felt calmer than I had any time. "Look here," said I. "I'm going to light this lamp." I took out a match, scratched it, and touched the third wick. The flame ran around, bigger than the other two together. But still her arms hung there. I bit my lip. "By God, I will!" said I to myself, and I lit the fourth.

It was fierce, sir, fierce! And yet those arms never trembled. I had to look around at her. Her eyes were still looking into mine, so deep and deep, and her red lips were still smiling with that queer sleepy droop; the only thing was that tears were raining down her cheeks — big, glowing, round jewel tears. It wasn't human, sir. It was like a dream.

"Pretty arms," she sighed, and then, as if those words had broken something in her heart, there came a great sob bursting from her lips. To hear it drove me mad. I reached to drag her away, but she was too quick, sir; she cringed from me and slipped out from between my hands. It was like she faded away, sir, and went down in a bundle, nursing her poor arms and mourning over them with those terrible, broken sobs.

The sound of them took the manhood out of me — you'd have been the same, sir. I knelt down beside her on the floor and covered my face.

"Please," I moaned. "Please! Please!" That's all I could say. I wanted her to forgive me. I reached out a hand, blind, for forgiveness, and I couldn't find her anywhere. I had hurt

her so, and she was afraid of me, of *me*, sir, who loved her so deep it drove me crazy.

I could see her down the stair, though it was dim and my eyes were filled with tears. I stumbled after her, crying, "Please! Please!" The little wicks I'd lit were blowing in the wind from the door and smoking the glass beside them black. One went out. I pleaded with them, the same as I would plead with a human being. I said I'd be back in a second. I promised. And I went on down the stair, crying like a baby because I'd hurt her, and she was afraid of me — of *me*, sir.

She had gone into her room. The door was closed against me and I could hear her sobbing beyond it, broken-hearted. My heart was broken, too. I beat on the door with my palms. I begged her to forgive me. I told her I loved her. And all the answer was that sobbing in the dark.

And then I lifted the latch and went in, groping, pleading. "Dearest — please! Because I love you!"

I heard her speak down near the floor. There wasn't any anger in her voice; nothing but sadness and despair.

"No," said she. "You don't love me, Ray. You never have."

"I do! I have!"

"No, no," said she, as if she was tired out.

"Where are you?" I was groping for her. I thought, and lit a match. She had got to the door and was standing there as if ready to fly. I went toward her, and she made me stop. She took my breath away. "I hurt your arms," said I, in a dream.

"No," said she, hardly moving her lips. She held them out to the match's light for me to look, and there was never a scar on them — not even that soft, golden down was singed, sir. "You can't hurt my body," said she, sad as anything. "Only my heart, Ray; my poor heart."



I tell you again, she took my breath away. I lit another match. "How can you be so beautiful?" I wondered.

She answered in riddles — but oh, the sadness of her, sir.

"Because," said she, "I've always so wanted to be."

"How come your eyes so heavy?" said I.

"Because I've seen so many things I never dreamed of," said she.

"How come your hair so thick?"

"It's the seaweed makes it thick," said she, smiling queer, queer.

"How come seaweed there?"

"Out of the bottom of the sea."

She talked in riddles, but it was like poetry to hear her, or a song.

"How come your lips so red?" said I.

"Because they've wanted so long to be kissed."

Fire was on me, sir. I reached out to catch her, but she was gone, out of the door and down the stair. I followed, stumbling. I must have tripped on the turn, for I remember going through the air and fetching up with a crash, and I didn't know anything for a spell — how long I can't say. When I came to, she was there, somewhere, bending over me, crooning, "My love — my love —" under her breath, like a song.

But then when I got up, she was not where my arms went; she was down the stair again, just ahead of me. I followed her. I was tottering and dizzy and full of pain. I tried to catch up with her in the dark of the store-room, but she was too quick for me, sir, always a little too quick for me. Oh, she was cruel to me, sir. I kept bumping against things, hurting myself still worse, and it was cold and wet and a horrible noise all the while, sir; and then, sir, I found the door was open, and a sea had parted the hinges.

I don't know how it all went, sir. I'd tell you if I could, but it's all so blurred — sometimes it seems more like a dream. I couldn't find her any more; I couldn't hear her; I went all over everywhere. Once, I remember, I found myself hanging out of that door between the davits, looking down into those big black seas and crying like a baby. It's all riddles and blur. I can't seem to tell you much, sir. It was all — all — I don't know.

I was talking to somebody else — not her. It was the Inspector. I hardly knew it was the Inspector. His face was as gray as a blanket, and his eyes were bloodshot, and his lips were twisted. His left wrist hung down, awkward. It was broken coming aboard the Light in that sea. Yes, we were in the living-room. Yes, sir, it was daylight — gray daylight. I tell you, sir, the man looked crazy to me. He was waving his good arm toward the weather windows, and what he was saying, over and over, was this:

*"Look what you done, damn you! Look what you done!"*

And what I was saying was this:

*"I've lost her!"*

I didn't pay any attention to him, nor him to me. By and by he did, though. He stopped his talking all of a sudden, and his eyes looked like the devil's eyes. He put them up close to mine. He grabbed my arm with his good hand, and I cried, I was so weak.

"Johnson," said he, "is that it? By the living God — if you got a woman out here, Johnson!"

"No," said I. "I've lost her."

"What do you mean — lost her?"

"It was dark," said I — and it's funny how my head was clearing up — "and the door was open — the store-room door — and I was after her — and I guess she stumbled, maybe — and I lost her."

"Johnson," said he, "what do you mean? You sound crazy — downright crazy. Who?"

"Her," said I. "Fedderson's wife."

"*Who?*"

"Her," said I. And with that he gave my arm another jerk.

"Listen," said he, like a tiger. "Don't try that on me. It won't do any good — that kind of lies — not where *you're* going to. Fedderson and his wife, too — the both of 'em's drowned deader'n a door-nail."

"I know," said I, nodding my head. I was so calm it made him wild.

"You're crazy! Crazy as a loon, Johnson!" And he was chewing his lip red. "I know, because it was me that found the old man laying on Back Water Flats yesterday morning — *me!* And she'd been with him in the boat, too, because he had a piece of her jacket tore off, tangled in his arm."

"I know," said I, nodding again, like that.

"You know *what*, you *crazy, murdering fool?*" Those were his words to me, sir.

"I know," said I, "what I know."

"And *I* know," said he, "what *I* know."

And there you are, sir. He's Inspector. I'm — nobody.

## THE BIG, FAT LUMMOX <sup>1</sup>

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

IN the morning sunshine, Mrs. Baxter stood at the top of the steps of the front porch, addressing her son, who listened impatiently and edged himself a little nearer the gate every time he shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

"Willie," she said, "you must really pay some attention to the laws of health, or you'll never live to be an old man."

"I don't want to live to be an old man," said William, earnestly. "I'd rather do what I please now and die a little sooner."

"You talk very foolishly," his mother returned. "Either come back and put on some heavier *things* or take your overcoat."

"My overcoat!" William groaned. "They'd think I was a lunatic, carrying an overcoat in August!"

"Not to a picnic," she said.

"Mother, it isn't a picnic, I've told you a hunderd times! You think it's one those ole-fashion things *you* used to go to — sit on the damp ground and eat sardines with ants all over 'em! This isn't anything like that; we just go out on the trolley to this farm-house and have noon dinner, and dance all afternoon, and have supper, and then come home on the trolley. I guess we'd hardly of got up anything as out o' date as a picnic in honor of Miss *Pratt*!"

Mrs. Baxter seemed unimpressed.

"It doesn't matter whether you call it a picnic or not, Willie.

<sup>1</sup> From *Seventeen*, by Booth Tarkington. Copyright, 1915, by Harper & Brothers. By special permission.

It will be cool on the open trolley-car coming home, especially with only those white trousers on — ”

“Ye gods!” he cried. “I’ve got other things on besides my trousers! I wish you wouldn’t always act as if I was a perfect child! Good heavens! isn’t a person my age supposed to know how much clothes to wear?”

“Well, if he is,” she returned, “it’s a mere supposition and not founded on fact. Don’t get so excited, Willie, please; but you’ll either have to give up the picnic or come in and ch— ”

“Change my ‘things’!” he wailed. “I can’t change my ‘things’! I’ve got just twenty minutes to get to May Parcher’s — the crowd meets there, and they’re goin’ to take the trolley in front the Parchers’ at exactly a quarter after ’leven. *Please* don’t keep me any longer, mother — I *got* to go!”

She stepped into the hall and returned immediately. “Here’s your overcoat, Willie.”

His expression was of despair. “They’ll think I’m a lunatic and they’ll say so before everybody — and I don’t blame ’em! Overcoat on a hot day like this! Except me, I don’t suppose there was ever anybody lived in the world and got to be going on eighteen years old and had to carry his silly old overcoat around with him in August — because his mother made him!”

“Willie,” said Mrs. Baxter, “you don’t know how many thousands and thousands of mothers for thousands and thousands of years have kept their sons from taking thousands and thousands of colds — just this way!”

He moaned. “Well, and I got to be called a lunatic just because you’re nervous, I s’pose. All right!”

She hung it upon his arm, kissed him; and he departed in a desperate manner.

However, having worn his tragic face for three blocks, he halted before a corner drug-store, and permitted his expression



to improve as he gazed upon the window display of My Little Sweetheart All-Tobacco Cuban Cigarettes, the Package of Twenty for Ten Cents. William was not a smoker — that is to say, he had made the usual boyhood experiments, finding them discouraging; and though at times he considered it humorously man-about-town to say to a smoking friend, “Well, I’ll tackle one o’ your ole coffin-nails;” he had never made a purchase of tobacco in his life. But it struck him now that it would be rather debonair to disport himself with a package of Little Sweethearts upon the excursion.

And the name! It thrilled him inexpressibly, bringing a tenderness into his eyes and a glow into his bosom. He felt that when he should smoke a Little Sweetheart it would be a tribute to the ineffable visitor for whom this party was being given — it would bring her closer to him. His young brow grew almost stern with determination, for he made up his mind, on the spot, that he would smoke oftener in the future — he would become a confirmed smoker, and all his life he would smoke My Little Sweetheart All-Tobacco Cuban Cigarettes.

He entered and managed to make his purchase in a matter-of-fact way, as if he were doing something quite unemotional, then he said to the clerk:

“Oh, by the by — ah — ”

The clerk stared. “Well, what else?”

“I mean,” said William, hurriedly, “there’s something I wanted to ’tend to, now I happen to be here. I was on my way to take this overcoat to — to get something altered at the tailor’s for next winter. ’Course I wouldn’t want it till winter, but I thought I might as well get it *done*.” He paused, laughing carelessly, for greater plausibility. “I thought he’d prob’ly want lots of time on the job — he’s a slow worker, I’ve noticed — and so I decided I might just as well go ahead and let him

get at it. Well, so I was on my way there, but I just noticed I only got about six minutes more to get to a mighty important engagement I got this morning, and I'd like to leave it here and come by and get it on my way home, this evening."

"Sure," said the clerk. "Hang it on that hook inside the p'scription-counter. There's one there already, b'longs to your friend, that young Bullitt fella. He was in here awhile ago and said he wanted to leave his because he didn't have time to take it to be pressed in time for next winter. Then he went on and joined that crowd in Mr. Parcher's yard, around the corner, that's goin' on a trolley-party. I says, 'I betcher mother maje carry it,' and he says, 'Oh no. Oh no,' he says. 'Honest, I was goin' to get it pressed!' You can hang yours on the same nail."

The clerk spoke no more, and went to serve another customer, while William stared after him a little uneasily. It seemed that here was a man of suspicious nature, though, of course, Joe Bullitt's shallow talk about getting an overcoat pressed before winter would not have imposed upon anybody. However, William felt strongly that the private life of the customers of a store should not be pried into and speculated about by employees, and he was conscious of a distaste for this clerk.

Nevertheless, it was with a lighter heart that he left his overcoat behind him and stepped out of the side door of the drug-store. That brought him within sight of the gaily dressed young people, about thirty in number, gathered upon the small lawn beside Mr. Parcher's house.

Miss Pratt stood among them, in heliotrope and white, Flopit nestling in her arms. She was encircled by girls who were enthusiastically caressing the bored and blinking Flopit; and when William beheld this charming group, his breath be-

came eccentric, his knee-caps became cold and convulsive, his neck became hot, and he broke into a light perspiration.

She saw him! The small blonde head and the delirious little fluffy hat above it shimmered a nod to him. Then his mouth fell unconsciously open, and his eyes grew glassy with the intensity of meaning he put into the silent response he sent across the picket fence and through the interstices of the intervening group. Pressing with his elbow upon the package of cigarettes in his pocket, he murmured, inaudibly, "My Little Sweet-heart, always for you!" — a repetition of his vow that, come what might, he would forever remain a loyal smoker of that symbolic brand. In fact, William's mental condition had never shown one moment's turn for the better since the fateful day of the distracting visitor's arrival.

Mr. Johnnie Watson and Mr. Joe Bullitt met him at the gate and offered him hearty greeting. All bickering and dissension among these three had passed. The lady was so wondrous impartial that, as time went on, the sufferers had come to be drawn together, rather than thrust asunder, by their common feeling. It had grown to be a bond uniting them; they were not so much rivals as ardent novices serving a single altar, each worshiping there without visible gain over the other. Each had even come to possess, in the eyes of his two fellows, almost a sacredness as a sharer in the celestial glamor; they were tender one with another. They were in the last stages.

Johnnie Watson had with him to-day a visitor of his own — a vastly overgrown person of eighteen, who, at Johnnie's beckoning, abandoned a fair companion of the moment and came forward as William entered the gate.

"I want to intradooce you to two of my most int'mut friends, George," said Johnnie, with the anxious gravity of a person about to do something important and unfamiliar. "Mr. Bax-

ter, let me intradooce my cousin, Mr. Crooper. Mr. Crooper, this is my friend, Mr. Baxter."

The gentlemen shook hands solemnly, saying, "'M very glad to meet you," and Johnnie turned to Joe Bullitt. "Mr. Croo— I mean, Mr. Bullitt, let me intradooce my friend, Mr. Crooper — I mean my cousin, Mr. Crooper. Mr. Crooper is a cousin of mine."

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Crooper," said Joe. "I suppose you're a cousin of Johnnie's, then?"

"Yep," said Mr. Crooper, becoming more informal. "Johnnie wrote me to come over for this shindig, so I thought I might as well come." He laughed loudly, and the others laughed with the same heartiness. "Yessir," he added, "I thought I might as well come, 'cause I'm pretty apt to be on hand if there's anything doin'!"

"Well, that's right," said William, and while they all laughed again, Mr. Crooper struck his cousin a jovial blow upon the back.

"Hi, ole sport!" he cried, "I want to meet that Miss Pratt before we start. The car'll be along pretty soon, and I got her picked for the girl I'm goin' to sit by."

The laughter of William and Joe Bullitt, designed to express cordiality, suddenly became flaccid and died. If Mr. Crooper had been a sensitive person he might have perceived the chilling disapproval in their glances, for they had just begun to be most unfavorably impressed with him. The careless loudness — almost the notoriety — with which he had uttered Miss Pratt's name, demanding loosely to be presented to her, regardless of the well-known law that a lady must first express some wish in such matters — these were indications of a coarse nature sure to be more than uncongenial to Miss Pratt. Its presence might make the whole occasion distasteful to her —

might spoil her day. Both William and Joe Bullitt began to wonder why on earth Johnnie Watson didn't have any more sense than to invite such a big, fat lummoX of a cousin to the party.

This severe phrase of theirs, almost simultaneous in the two minds, was not wholly a failure as a thumb-nail sketch of Mr. George Crooper. And yet there was the impressiveness of size about him, especially about his legs and chin. At seventeen and eighteen growth is still going on, sometimes in a sporadic way, several parts seeming to have sprouted faster than others. Often the features have not quite settled down together in harmony, a mouth, for instance, appearing to have gained such a lead over the rest of a face, that even a mother may fear it can never be overtaken. Voices, too, often seem misplaced; one hears, outside the door, the bass rumble of a sinister giant, and a mild boy, thin as a cricket, walks in. The contrary was George Crooper's case; his voice was an unexpected piping tenor, half falsetto and frequently girlish — as surprising as the absurd voice of an elephant.

He had the general outwardness of a vast and lumpy child. His chin had so distanced his other features that his eyes, nose, and brow seemed almost baby-like in comparison, while his mountainous legs were the great part of the rest of him. He was one of those huge, bottle-shaped boys who are always in motion in spite of their cumbersomeness. His gestures were continuous, though difficult to interpret as bearing upon the subject of his equally continuous conversation; and under all circumstances he kept his conspicuous legs incessantly moving, whether he was going anywhere or remaining in comparatively one spot.

His expression was pathetically offensive, the result of his bland confidence in the audible opinions of a small town where-



of his father was the richest inhabitant -- and the one thing about him, even more obvious than his chin, his legs, and his spectacular taste in flannels, was his perfect trust that he was as welcome to every one as he was to his mother. This might some day lead him in the direction of great pain, but on the occasion of the "subscription party" for Miss Pratt it gave him an advantage.

"When do I get to meet that cutie?" he insisted, as Johnnie Watson moved backward from the cousinly arm, which threatened further flailing. "You intradoosed me to about seven I can't do much *for*, but I want to get the howdy business over with this Miss Pratt, so I and she can get things started. I'm goin' to keep her busy all day!"

"Well, don't be in such a hurry," said Johnnie, uneasily. "You can meet her when we get out in the country -- if I get a chance, George."

"No, sir!" George protested, jovially. "I guess you're sad birds over in this town, but look out! When I hit a town it don't take long till they all hear there's something doin'! You know how I am when I get started, Johnnie!" Here he turned upon William, tucking his fat arm affectionately through William's thin one. "Hi, sport! Ole Johnnie's so slow, *you* toddle me over and get me fixed up with this Miss Pratt, and I'll tell her you're the real stuff -- after we get engaged!"

He was evidently a true cloud-compeller, this horrible George.

William extricated his arm, huskily muttering words which were lost in the general outcry, "Car's coming!" The young people poured out through the gate, and, as the car stopped, scrambled aboard. For a moment everything was hurried and confused. William struggled anxiously to push through to

Miss Pratt and climb up beside her, but Mr. George Crooper made his way into the crowd in a beaming, though bull-like manner, and a fat back in a purple-and-white "blazer" flattened William's nose, while ponderous heels damaged William's toes; he was shoved back, and just managed to clamber upon the foot-board as the car started. The friendly hand of Joe Bullitt pulled him to a seat, and William found himself rubbing his nose and sitting between Joe and Johnnie Watson, directly behind the dashing Crooper and Miss Pratt. Mr. Crooper had already taken Flopit upon his lap.

"Dogs are always crazy 'bout me," they heard him say, for his high voice was but too audible over all other sounds. "Dogs and chuldren. I dunno why it is, but they always take to me. My name's George Crooper, Third, Johnnie Watson's cousin. He was tryin' to intradooce me before the car came along, but he never got the chance. I guess as this shindig's for you, and I'm the only other guest from out o' town, we'll have to intradooce ourselves — the two guests of honor, as it were."

Miss Pratt laughed her silvery laugh, murmured politely, and turned no freezing glance upon her neighbor. Indeed, it seemed that she was far from regarding him with the distaste anticipated by William and Joe Bullitt. "Flopit look so toot an' tunnin'," she was heard to remark. "Flopit look so 'ittle on dray, big, 'normous man's lap."

Mr. Crooper laughed deprecatingly. "He does look kind of small compared with the good ole man that's got charge of him, now! Well, I always was a good deal bigger than the fellas I went with. I dunno why it is, but I was always kind of quicker, too, as it were — and the strongest in any crowd I ever got with. I'm kind of muscle-bound, I guess, but I don't let that interfere with my quickness any. Take me in an auto-

mobile, now — I got a racin'-car at home — and I keep my head better than most people do, as it were. I can kind of handle myself better; I dunno why it is. My brains seem to work better than other people's, that's all it is. I don't mean that I got more sense, or anything like that; it's just the way my brains work; they kind of put me at an advantage, as it were. Well, f'rinstance, if I'd been livin' here in this town and joined in with the crowd to get up this party, well, it would of been done a good deal diff'rent. I won't say better, but diff'rent. That's always the way with me — if I go into anything, pretty soon I'm running the whole shebang; I dunno why it is. The other people might try to run it their way for a while, but pretty soon you notice 'em beginning to step out of the way for good ole George. I dunno why it is, but that's the way it goes. Well, if I'd been running *this* party I'd of had automobiles to go out in, not a trolley-car where you all got to sit together — and I'd of sent over home for my little racer and I'd of taken you out in her myself. I wish I'd of sent for it, anyway. We could of let the rest go out in the trolley, and you and I could of got off by ourselves: I'd like you to see that little car. Well, anyway, I bet you'd of seen something pretty different and a whole lot better if I'd of come over to this town in time to get up this party for you!"

"For *us*," Miss Pratt corrected him, sunnily. "Bofe strangers — party for us two — all bofe!" And she gave him one of her looks.

Mr. Crooper flushed with emotion; he was annexed; he became serious. "Say," he said, "that's a mighty smooth hat you got on." And he touched the fluffy rim of it with his forefinger. His fat shoulders leaned toward her yearningly.

"We'd cert'nly of had a lot better time sizzin' along in that little racer I got," he said. "I'd like to had you see how I

handle that little car. Girls over home, they say they like to go out with me just to watch the way I handle her; they say it ain't so much just the ride, but more the way I handle that little car. I dunno why it is, but that's what they say. That's the way I do anything I make up my mind to tackle, though. I don't try to tackle everything — there's lots o' things I wouldn't take enough interest in 'em, as it were — but just lemme make up my mind once, and it's all off; I dunno why it is. There was a brakeman on the train got kind of fresh: he didn't know who I was. Well, I just put my hand on his shoulder and pushed him down in his seat like this" — he set his hand upon Miss Pratt's shoulder. "I didn't want to hit him, because there was women and children in the car, so I just shoved my face up close to him, like this. 'I guess you don't know how much stock my father's got in this road,' I says. Did he wilt? Well, you ought of seen that brakeman when I got through tellin' him who I was!"

"Nassy ole brateman!" said Miss Pratt, with unfailing sympathy.

Mr. Crooper's fat hand, as if unconsciously, gave Miss Pratt's delicate shoulder a little pat in reluctant withdrawal. "Well, that's the way with me," he said. "Much as I been around this world, nobody ever tried to put anything over on me and got away with it. They always come out the little end o' the horn; I dunno why it is. Say, that's a mighty smooth locket you got on the end o' that chain, there." And again stretching forth his hand, in a proprietor-like way, he began to examine the locket.

Three hot hearts, just behind, pulsed hatred toward him; for Johnnie Watson had perceived his error, and his sentiments were now linked to those of Joe Bullitt and William. The unhappiness of these three helpless spectators was the more poignant

ant because not only were they witnesses of the impression of greatness which George Crooper was obviously producing upon Miss Pratt, but they were unable to prevent themselves from being likewise impressed.

They were not analytical; they dumbly accepted George at his own rating, not even being able to charge him with lack of modesty. Did he not always accompany his testimonials to himself with his deprecating falsetto laugh and "I dunno why it is," an official disclaimer of merit, "as it were"? Here was a formidable candidate, indeed — a traveler, a man of the world, with brains better and quicker than other people's brains; an athlete, yet knightly — he would not destroy even a brakeman in the presence of women and children — and, finally, most enviable and deadly, the owner and operator of a "little racer"! All this glitter was not far short of overpowering; and yet, though accepting it as fact, the woeful three shared the inconsistent belief that in spite of everything George was nothing but a big, fat lummoX. For thus they even rather loudly whispered of him — almost as if hopeful that Miss Pratt, and mayhap George himself, might overhear.

Impotent their seething! The overwhelming Crooper pursued his conquering way. He leaned more and more toward the magnetic girl, his growing tenderness having that effect upon him, and his head inclining so far that his bedewed brow now and then touched the fluffy hat. He was constitutionally restless, but his movements never ended by placing a greater distance between himself and Miss Pratt, though they sometimes discommoded Miss Parcher, who sat at the other side of him — a side of him which appeared to be without consciousness. He played naïvely with Miss Pratt's locket and with the filmy border of her collar; he flicked his nose for some time with her little handkerchief, loudly sniffing its scent; and finally



he became interested in a ring she wore, removed it, and tried unsuccessfully to place it upon one of his own fingers.

"I've worn lots o' girls' rings on my watch-fob. I'd let 'em wear mine on a chain or something. I guess they like to do that with me," he said. "I dunno why it is."

At this subtle hint the three unfortunates held their breath, and then lost it as the lovely girl acquiesced in the horrible exchange. As for William, life was of no more use to him. Out of the blue heaven of that bright morning's promise had fallen a pall, draping his soul in black and purple. He had been horror-stricken when first the pudgy finger of George Crooper had touched the fluffy edge of that sacred little hat; then, during George's subsequent pawings and leanings, William felt that he must either rise and murder or go mad. But when the exchange of rings was accomplished, his spirit broke and even resentment oozed away. For a time there was no room in him for anything except misery.

Dully, William's eyes watched the fat shoulders hitching and twitching, while the heavy arms flourished in gesture and in further pawings. Again and again were William's ears afflicted with, "I dunno why it is," following upon tribute after tribute paid by Mr. Crooper to himself, and received with little cries of admiration and sweet child-words on the part of Miss Pratt. It was a long and accursed ride.

At the farm-house where the party were to dine, Miss Pratt with joy discovered a harmonium in the parlor, and, seating herself, with all the girls, Flopit, and Mr. George Crooper gathered around her, she played an accompaniment, while George, in a thin tenor of detestable sweetness, sang "I'm Falling in Love with Some One."

His performance was rapturously greeted, especially by the accompanist. "Oh, wunnerfulest Untle Georgiecums!" she

cried, for that was now the gentleman's name. "If Johnnie McCormack hear Untle Georgiecums he go shoot umself dead — Bang!" She looked round to where three figures hovered morosely in the rear. "Tum on, sin' chorus, Big Bruvva Josie-Joe, Johnny Jump-up, an' Ickle Boy Baxter. All over adain, Untle Georgiecums! Boys an' dirls all sin' chorus. Tum-mence!"

And so the heartrending performance continued until it was stopped by Wallace Banks, the altruistic and perspiring youth who had charge of the subscription-list for the party, and the consequent collection of assessments. This entitled Wallace to look haggard and to act as master of ceremonies. He mounted a chair.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he bellowed, "I want to say — that is — ah — I am requested to announce that before dinner we're all supposed to take a walk around the farm and look at things, as this is supposed to be kind of a model farm or supposed to be something like that. There's a Swedish lady named Anna going to show us around. She's out in the yard waiting, so please follow her to inspect the farm."

To inspect a farm was probably the least of William's desires. He wished only to die in some quiet spot and to have Miss Pratt told about it in words that would show her what she had thrown away. But he followed with the others, in the wake of the Swedish lady named Anna, and as they stood in the cavernous hollow of the great barn he found his condition suddenly improved.

Miss Pratt turned to him unexpectedly and placed Flopit in his arms. "Keep p'eshus Flopit cozy," she whispered. "Flopit love ole friends best!"

William's heart leaped, while a joyous warmth spread all over him. And though the execrable lummoX immediately

propelled Miss Pratt forward — by her elbow — to hear the descriptive remarks of the Swedish lady named Anna, William's soul remained uplifted and entranced. She had not said "like"; she had said, "Flopit *love* ole friends best"! William pressed forward valiantly, and placed himself as close as possible upon the right of Miss Pratt, the lummoX being upon her left. A moment later, William wished that he had remained in the rear.

This was due to the unnecessary frankness of the Swedish lady named Anna, who was briefly pointing out the efficiency of various agricultural devices. Her attention being diverted by some effusions of pride on the part of a passing hen, she thought fit to laugh and say:

"She yust laid egg."

William shuddered. This grossness in the presence of Miss Pratt was unthinkable. His mind refused to deal with so impossible a situation; he could not accept it as a fact that such words had actually been uttered in such a presence. And yet it was the truth; his incredulous ears still sizzled. "She yust laid egg!" His entire skin became flushed; his averted eyes glazed themselves with shame.

He was not the only person shocked by the ribaldry of the Swedish lady named Anna. Joe Bullitt and Johnnie Watson, on the outskirts of the group, went to Wallace Banks, drew him aside, and, with feverish eloquence, set his responsibilities before him. It was his duty, they urged, to have an immediate interview with this free-spoken Anna and instruct her in the proprieties. Wallace had been almost as horrified as they by her loose remark, but he declined the office they proposed for him, offering, however, to appoint them as a committee with authority in the matter — whereupon they retorted with unreasonable indignation, demanding to know what he took them for.

Unconscious of the embarrassment she had caused in these several masculine minds, the Swedish lady named Anna led the party onward, continuing her agricultural lecture. William walked mechanically, his eyes averted and looking at no one. And throughout this agony he was burningly conscious of the blasphemed presence of Miss Pratt beside him.

Therefore, it was with no little surprise, when the party came out of the barn, that William beheld Miss Pratt, not walking at his side, but, on the contrary, sitting too cozily with George Crooper upon a fallen tree at the edge of a peach-orchard just beyond the barn-yard. It was Miss Parcher who had been walking beside him, for the truant couple had made their escape at the beginning of the Swedish lady's discourse.

In vain William murmured to himself, "Flopit love ole friends best." Purple and black again descended upon his soul, for he could not disguise from himself the damnatory fact that George had flitted with the lady, while he, wretched William, had been permitted to take care of the dog!

A spark of dignity still burned within him. He strode to the barn-yard fence, and, leaning over it, dropped Flopit rather brusquely at his mistress's feet. Then, without a word — even without a look — William walked haughtily away, continuing his stern progress straight through the barn-yard gate, and thence onward until he found himself in solitude upon the far side of a smoke-house, where his hauteur vanished.

Here, in the shade of a great walnut-tree which sheltered the little building, he gave way — not to tears, certainly, but to faint murmurings and little heavings under impulses as ancient as young love itself. It is to be supposed that William considered his condition a lonely one, but if all the seventeen-year-olds who have known such half-hours could have shown themselves to him then, he would have fled from the mere

horror of billions. Alas! he considered his sufferings a new invention in the world, and there was now inspired in his breast a monologue so eloquently bitter that it might deserve some such title as *A Passion Beside the Smoke-house*. During the little time that William spent in this sequestration he passed through phases of emotion which would have kept an older man busy for weeks and left him wrecked at the end of them.

William's final mood was one of beautiful resignation with a kick in it; that is, he nobly gave her up to George and added irresistibly that George was a big, fat lummoX! Painting pictures, such as the billions of other young sufferers before him have painted, William saw himself a sad, gentle old bachelor at the family fireside, sometimes making the sacrifice of his reputation so that *she* and the children might never know the truth about George; and he gave himself the solace of a fierce scene or two with George: "Remember, it is for them, not you — you *thing!*"

After this human little reaction he passed to a higher field of romance. He would die for George — and then she would bring the little boy she had named William to the lonely headstone — Suddenly William saw himself in his true and fitting character — Sydney Carton! He had lately read *A Tale of Two Cities*, immediately re-reading until, as he would have said, he "knew it by heart"; and even at the time he had seen resemblances between himself and the appealing figure of Carton. Now that the sympathy between them was perfected by Miss Pratt's preference for another, William decided to mount the scaffold in place of George Crooper. The scene became actual to him, and, setting one foot upon a tin milk-pail which some one had carelessly left beside the smoke-house, he lifted his eyes to the pitiless blue sky and uncon-



sciously assumed the familiar attitude of Carton on the steps of the guillotine. He spoke aloud those great last words:

"It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to — "

A whiskered head on the end of a long, corrugated red neck protruded from the smoke-house door.

"What say?" it inquired, huskily.

"Nun-nothing!" stammered William.

Eyes above whiskers became fierce. "You take your feet off that milk-bucket. Say! This here's a sanitary farm. 'Ain't you got any more sense'n to go an' — "

But William had abruptly removed his foot and departed.

He found the party noisily established in the farm-house at two long tables piled with bucolic viands already being violently depleted. Johnnie Watson had kept a chair beside himself vacant for William. Johnnie was in no frame of mind to sit beside any "chattering girl," and he had protected himself by Joe Bullitt upon his right and the empty seat upon his left. William took it, and gazed upon the nearer foods with a slight renewal of animation.

He began to eat; he continued to eat; in fact, he did well. So did his two comrades. Not that the melancholy of these three was dispersed — far from it! With ineffaceable gloom they ate chicken, both white meat and dark, drumsticks, wish-bones, and livers; they ate corn-on-the-cob, many ears, and fried potatoes and green peas and string-beans; they ate peach preserves and apricot preserves and preserved pears; they ate biscuits with grape jelly and biscuits with crab-apple jelly; they ate apple sauce and apple butter and apple pie. They ate pickles, both cucumber pickles and pickles made of watermelon rind; they ate pickled tomatoes, pickled peppers, also pickled onions. They ate lemon pie.

At that, they were no rivals to George Crooper, who was a real eater. Love had not made his appetite ethereal to-day, and even the attending Swedish lady named Anna felt some apprehension when it came to George and the gravy, though she was accustomed to the prodigies performed in this line by the robust hinds on the farm. George laid waste his section of the table, and from the beginning he allowed himself scarce time to say, "I dunno why it is." The pretty companion at his side at first gazed dumfounded; then, with growing enthusiasm for what promised to be a really magnificent performance, she began to utter little ejaculations of wonder and admiration. With this music in his ears, George outdid himself. He could not resist the temptation to be more and more astonishing as a heroic comedian, for these humors sometimes come upon vain people at country dinners.

George ate when he had eaten more than he needed; he ate long after every one understood why he was so vast; he ate on and on sheerly as a flourish — as a spectacle. He ate even when he himself began to understand that there was daring in what he did, for his was a toreador spirit so long as he could keep bright eyes fastened upon him.

Finally, he ate to decide wagers made upon his gorging, though at times during this last period his joviality deserted him. Anon his damp brow would be troubled, and he knew moments of thoughtfulness.

When George did stop, it was abruptly, during one of these intervals of sobriety, and he and Miss Pratt came out of the house together rather quietly, joining one of the groups of young people chatting with after-dinner languor under the trees. However, Mr. Crooper began to revive presently, in the sweet air of outdoors, and, observing some of the more dashing gentlemen lighting cigarettes, he was moved to laughter. He

had not smoked since his childhood — having then been bonded through to twenty-one with a pledge of gold — and he feared that these smoking youths might feel themselves superior. Worse, Miss Pratt might be impressed; therefore he laughed in scorn, saying:

“Burnin’ up ole trash around here, I expect!” He sniffed searchingly. “Somebody’s set some ole rags on fire.” Then, as in discovery, he cried, “Oh no, only cigarettes!”

Miss Pratt, that tactful girl, counted four smokers in the group about her, and only one abstainer, George. She at once defended the smokers, for it is to be feared that numbers always had weight with her. “Oh, but cigarettes is lubly smell!” she said. “Untle Georgiecums maybe be too ’ittle boy for smokings!”

This archness was greeted loudly by the smokers, and Mr. Crooper was put upon his mettle. He spoke too quickly to consider whether or no the facts justified his assertion. “Me? I don’t smoke paper and ole carpets. I smoke cigars!”

He had created the right impression, for Miss Pratt clapped her hands. “Oh, ’plendid! Light one, Untle Georgiecums! Light one ever ’n’ ever so quick! P’eshus Flopit an’ me we want see dray, big, ’normous man smoke dray, big, ’normous cigar!”

William and Johnnie Watson, who had been hovering morbidly, unable to resist the lodestone, came nearer, Johnnie being just in time to hear his cousin’s reply.

“I — I forgot my cigar-case.”

Johnnie’s expression became one of biting skepticism. “What you talkin’ about, George? Didn’t you promise Uncle George you’d never smoke till you’re of age, and Uncle George said he’d give you a thousand dollars on your twenty-first birthday? What’d you say about your ‘cigar-case’?”

George felt that he was in a tight place, and the lovely eyes of Miss Pratt turned upon him questioningly. He could not flush, for he was already so pink after his exploits with unnecessary nutriment that more pinkness was impossible. He saw that the only safety for him lay in boisterous prevarication. "A thousand dollars!" he laughed loudly. "I thought that was real money when I was ten years old! It didn't stand in *my* way very long, I guess! Good ole George wanted his smoke, and he went after it! You know how I am, Johnnie, when I go after anything. I been smokin' cigars I dunno how long!" Glancing about him, his eye became reassured; it was obvious that even Johnnie had accepted this airy statement as the truth, and to clinch plausibility he added: "When I smoke, I smoke! I smoke cigars straight along — light one right on the stub of the other. I only wish I had some with me, because I miss 'em after a meal. I'd give a good deal for something to smoke right now! I don't mean cigarettes; I don't want any paper — I want something that's all tobacco!"

William's pale, sad face showed a hint of color. With a pang he remembered the package of My Little Sweetheart All-Tobacco Cuban Cigarettes (the Package of Twenty for Ten Cents) which still reposed, untouched, in the breast pocket of his coat. His eyes smarted a little as he recalled the thoughts and hopes that had accompanied the purchase; but he thought, "What would Sydney Carton do?"

William brought forth the package of My Little Sweetheart All-Tobacco Cuban Cigarettes and placed it in the large hand of George Crooper. And this was a noble act, for William believed that George really wished to smoke. "Here," he said, "take these; they're all tobacco. I'm goin' to quit smokin', anyway." And, thinking of the name, he added, gently, with

a significance lost upon all his hearers, "I'm sure you ought to have 'em instead of me."

Then he went away and sat alone upon the fence.

"Light one, light one!" cried Miss Pratt. "Ev'ybody mus' be happy, an' dray, big, 'normous man tan't be happy 'less he have his all-tobatto smote. Light it, light it!"

George drew as deep a breath as his diaphragm, strangely oppressed since dinner, would permit, and then bravely lit a Little Sweetheart. There must have been some valiant blood in him, for, as he exhaled the smoke, he covered a slight choking by exclaiming, loudly: "*That's* good! That's the ole stuff! That's what I was lookin' for!"

Miss Pratt was entranced. "Oh, 'plendid!" she cried, watching him with fascinated eyes. "Now take dray, big, 'normous puffs! Take dray, big, '*normous* puffs!"

George took great, big, enormous puffs.

She declared that she loved to watch men smoke, and William's heart, as he sat on the distant fence, was wrung and wrung again by the vision of her playful ecstasies. But when he saw her holding what was left of the first Little Sweetheart for George to light a second at its expiring spark, he could not bear it. He dropped from the fence and moped away to be out of sight once more. This was his darkest hour.

Studiously avoiding the vicinity of the smoke-house, he sought the little orchard where he had beheld her sitting with George; and there he sat himself in sorrowful reverie upon the selfsame fallen tree. How long he remained there is uncertain, but he was roused by the sound of music which came from the lawn before the farm-house. Bitterly he smiled, remembering that Wallace Banks had engaged Italians with harp, violin, and flute, promising great things for dancing on a fresh-clipped lawn — a turf floor being no impediment to seventeen's



dancing. Music! To see her whirling and smiling sunnily in the fat grasp of that dancing bear! He would stay in this lonely orchard; *she* would not miss him.

But though he hated the throbbing music and the sound of the laughing voices that came to him, he could not keep away — and when he reached the lawn where the dancers were, he found Miss Pratt moving rhythmically in the thin grasp of Wallace Banks. Johnnie Watson approached, and spoke in a low tone, tinged with spiteful triumph.

"Well, anyway, ole fat George didn't get the first dance with her! She's the guest of honor, and Wallace had a right to it because he did all the work. He came up to 'em and ole fat George couldn't say a thing. Wallace just took her right away from him. George didn't say anything at all, but I s'pose after this dance he'll be rushin' around again and nobody else'll have a chance to get near her the rest of the afternoon. My mother told me I ought to invite him over here, but I had no business to do it; he don't know the first principles of how to act in a town he don't live in!"

"Where'd he go?" William asked, listlessly, for Mr. Crooper was nowhere in sight.

"I don't know — he just walked off without sayin' anything. But he'll be back, time this dance is over, never you fear, and he'll grab her again and — What's the matter with Joe?"

Joseph Bullitt had made his appearance at a corner of the house, some distance from where they stood. His face was alert under the impulse of strong excitement, and he beckoned fiercely. "Come here!" And, when they had obeyed, "He's around back of the house by a kind of shed," said Joe. "I think something's wrong. Come on, I'll show him to you."

But behind the house, whither they followed him in vague, strange hope, he checked them. "*Look there!*" he said.

His pointing finger was not needed. Sounds of paroxysm drew their attention sufficiently — sounds most poignant, soul-rending, and lugubrious. William and Johnnie perceived the large person of Mr. Crooper; he was seated upon the ground, his back propped obliquely against the smoke-house, though this attitude was not maintained constantly.

Facing him, at a little distance, a rugged figure in homely garments stood leaning upon a hoe and regarding George with a cold interest. The apex of this figure was a volcanic straw hat, triangular in profile and coned with an open crater emitting reddish wisps, while below the hat were several features, but more whiskers, at the top of a long, corrugated red neck of sterling worth. A husky voice issued from the whiskers, addressing George.

"I seen you!" it said. "I seen you eatin'! This here farm is supposed to be a sanitary farm, and you'd ought of knew better. Go it, doggone you! Go it!"

George complied. And three spectators, remaining aloof, but watching zealously, began to feel their lost faith in Providence returning into them; their faces brightened slowly, and without relapse. It was a visible thing how the world became fairer and better in their eyes during that little while they stood there. And William saw that his Little Sweethearts had been an inspired purchase, after all; they had delivered the final tap upon a tottering edifice. George's deeds at dinner had unsettled, but Little Sweethearts had overthrown — and now there was awful work among the ruins, to an ironical accompaniment of music from the front yard, where people danced in heaven's sunshine!

This accompaniment came to a stop, and Johnnie Watson jumped. He seized each of his companions by a sleeve and spoke eagerly, his eyes glowing with a warm and brotherly

light. "Here!" he cried. "We better get around there — this looks like it was goin' to last all afternoon. Joe, you get the next dance with her, and just about time the music slows up you dance her around so you can stop right near where Bill will be standin', so Bill can get her quick for the dance after that. Then, Bill, you do the same for me, and I'll do the same for Joe again, and then, Joe, you do it for Bill again, and then Bill for me — and so on. If we go in right now and work together we can crowd the rest out, and there won't anybody else get to dance with her the whole day! Come on quick!"

United in purpose, the three ran lightly to the dancing-lawn, and Mr. Bullitt was successful, after a little debate, in obtaining the next dance with the lovely guest of the day. "I did promise big Untle Georgiecums," she said, looking about her.

"Well, I don't think he'll come," said Joe. "That is, I'm pretty sure he won't."

A shade fell upon the exquisite face. "No'ty. Bruvva Josie-Joe! The Men *always* tum when Lola promises dances. Mustn't be rude!"

"Well — " Joe began, when he was interrupted by the Swedish lady named Anna, who spoke to them from the steps of the house. Of the merrymakers they were the nearest.

"Dot pick fella," said Anna, "dot one dot eats — we make him in a petroom. He holler! He tank he neet some halp."

"Does he want a doctor?" Joe asked.

"Doctor? No! He want make him in a amyoulance for hospital!"

"I'll go look at him," Johnnie Watson volunteered, running up. "He's my cousin, and I guess I got to take the responsibility."

Miss Pratt paid the invalid the tribute of one faintly commiserating glance toward the house. "Well," she said, "if

people would rather eat too much than dance!" She meant "dance with *me!*" though she thought it prettier not to say so. "Come on, Bruvva Josie-Joe!" she cried, joyously.

And a little later Johnnie Watson approached her where she stood with a restored and refulgent William, about to begin the succeeding dance. Johnnie dropped into her hand a ring, receiving one in return. "I thought I better *get* it," he said, offering no further explanation. "I'll take care of his until we get home. He's all right," said Johnnie, and then perceiving a sudden advent of apprehension upon the sensitive brow of William, he went on reassuringly: "He's doin' as well as anybody could expect; that is — after the crazy way he *did!* He's always been considered the dumbest one in all our relations — never did know how to act. I don't mean he's exactly not got his senses, or ought to be watched, anything like that — and of course he belongs to an awful good family — but he's just k'nd of the black sheep when it comes to intelligence, or anything like that. I got him as comfortable as a person could be, and they're givin' him hot water and mustard and stuff, but what he needs now is just to be kind of quiet. It'll do him a lot o' good," Johnnie concluded, with a spark in his voice, "to lay there the rest of the afternoon and get quieted down, kind of."

"You don't think there's any — " William began, and, after a pause, continued — "any hope — of his getting strong enough to come out and dance afterwhile?"

Johnnie shook his head. "None in the world!" he said, conclusively. "The best we can do for him is to let him entirely alone till after supper, and then ask nobody to sit on the back seat of the trolley-car goin' home, so we can make him comfortable back there, and let him kind of stretch out by himself."

Then gaily tinkled harp, gaily sang flute and violin! Over

the greensward William lightly bore his lady, while radiant was the cleared sky above the happy dancers. William's fingers touched those delicate fingers; the exquisite face smiled rosily up to him; undreamable sweetness beat rhythmically upon his glowing ears; his feet moved in a rhapsody of companionship with hers. They danced and danced and danced!

Then Joe danced with her, while William and Johnnie stood with hands upon each other's shoulders and watched, mayhap with longing, but without spite; then Johnnie danced with her while Joe and William watched — and then William danced with her again.

So passed the long, ineffable afternoon away — ah, Seventeen!

"... 'Jav a good time at the trolley-party?" the clerk in the corner drug-store inquired that evening.

"Fine!" said William, taking his overcoat from the hook where he had left it.

"How j' like them Little Sweethearts I sold you?"

"*Fine!*" said William.



## LOIS DRAKE <sup>1</sup>

By HUGH WALPOLE

MISS LOIS DRAKE lived in one of the attics at the top of Hortons. That sounds poverty-struck and democratic, but as a matter of fact it was precisely the opposite.

The so-called "attics" at Hortons are amongst the very handsomest flats in London, their windows command some of the very best views, and the sloping roof that gives them their name does not slope enough to make them inconvenient, only enough to make them quaint.

Miss Drake was lucky, and asked Mr. Nix whether he had any flats to let on the very day that one of the attics was vacated. But then, Miss Drake was always lucky, as you could see quite well if you looked at her. She was a tall, slim girl, with dark brown hair, an imperious brow, and what her friends called a "bossy" mouth. It was, indeed, her character to be "bossy." Her father, that noted traveller and big-game hunter, had encouraged her to be "bossy"; the Drakes and the Bosanquets and the Mumpuses, all the good old county families with whom she was connected, encouraged her to be "bossy." Finally, the war had encouraged her to be "bossy." She had become in the early days of 1915 an officer in the "W.A.A.C." and since then she had risen to every kind of distinction. She had done magnificently in France; had won medals and honours. No wonder she believed in herself. She was born to command other women; she had just that contempt for her sex and approval of herself necessary for com-

<sup>1</sup> "Lois Drake," reprinted from *The Thirteen Travellers*, by Hugh Walpole, by permission of George H. Doran Company, Publishers. Copyright, 1921.

mand. She believed that women were greatly inferior to men; nevertheless, she was always indignant did men not fall down instantly and abase themselves before the women of whom she approved. "She bore herself as a queen," so her adoring friends said; quite frankly she considered herself one. The "W.A.A.C." uniform suited her; she liked stiff collars and short skirts and tight belts. She was full-breasted, had fine athletic limbs, her cheeks were flushed with health. Then the Armistice came, and somewhere in March she found herself demobilised. It was then that she took her attic at Hortons. Her father had died of dysentery in Egypt in 1915, and had left her amply provided for. Her mother, who was of no account, being only a Chipping-Basset and retiring by nature, lived at Dolles Hall, in Wiltshire, and troubled no one. Lois was the only child.

She could, then, spend her life as she pleased, and she soon discovered that there was plenty to do. Her nature had never been either modest or retiring; she had from the earliest possible age read everything that came her way, and five years at Morton House School, one year in Germany, and four months in East Africa with her father had left her, as she herself said, "with nothing about men that *she* didn't know."

The war took away her last reserves. She was a modern woman, and saw life steadily and saw it whole. She also saw it entirely to her own advantage. The strongest element in her nature was, perhaps, her assured self-confidence in her management of human beings. She had, she would boast, never been known to fail with men or women. Her success in the war had been largely due to the fact that she had applied certain simple rules of her own to everybody alike, refusing to believe in individualities. "Men and women fall into two or three classes. You can tell in five minutes the class you're

dealing with; then you act accordingly." Her chief theory about men was that "they liked to be treated as men." "They want you to be one of themselves." She adopted with them a masculine attitude that fitted her less naturally than she knew. She drank with them, smoked with them, told them rather "tall" stories, was never shocked by anything that they said, "gave them as good as they gave her."

After her demobilisation she danced a good deal, dined alone at restaurants with men whom she scarcely knew, went back to men's rooms after the theatre and had a "last whiskey," walked home alone after midnight and let herself into her "attic" with great satisfaction. She had the most complete contempt for girls who "could not look after themselves." "If girls got into trouble it was their own rotten fault."

She had developed during her time in France a masculine fashion of standing, sitting, talking, laughing. Nothing made her more indignant than that a man should offer her his seat in a Tube. How her haughty glance scorned him as she refused him! "It's an insult to our sex," she would say. How she rejoiced in her freedom! "At last," she said, "there is sex equality. We can do what we like."

She was, however, not *quite* free. The war had left her a legacy in the person of an adoring girl friend, Margery Scales. Margery was an exact opposite to herself in every way — plump and soft and rosy and appealing and entirely feminine. She had been "under" Lois in France; from the first she had desperately adored her. It was an adoration without qualification. Lois was perfect, a queen, a goddess. Margery would die for her instantly if called upon; not that she wanted to die. She loved life, being pretty and healthy, and allowed by loving parents a great deal of freedom.

But what was life without Lois? Lois would tell you, if you

asked her, that she had *made* Margery. "Margery owed her everything." Others, who did not like Lois, said that she had ruined Margery. Margery herself felt that life had simply not begun in those years before Lois had appeared.

Lois had determined that "after the war" she would finish the Margery affair. It unsettled her, refused to fall into line with all the straightforward arrangements that were as easy to manage as "putting your clothes on." The truth was, that Lois was fonder of Margery than she wanted to be. She quarrelled with her, scolded her, laughed at her, scorned her, and at the end of it all had absurdly soft and tender feelings for her that were not at all "sensible."

Margery's very helplessness — a quality that infuriated Lois in others — attracted and held her. She had too much to do to bother about people's feelings; nevertheless, were Margery distressed and unhappy, Lois was uncomfortable and ill at ease. "After the war I'll break it off. . . . It's sentimental."

Nevertheless, here she was, four months, five months, six months after the Armistice, and it was not broken off. She would dismiss Margery with scorn, tell her that she could not be bothered with her scenes and tears and repentances, and then five minutes after she had expelled her she would want to know where she was, what she was doing.

She would not confess to herself the joy that she felt when Margery suddenly reappeared. Then, as the weeks went by, she began to wonder whether Margery were as completely under her control as she used to be. The girl seemed at times to criticise her. She said quite frankly that she hated some of the men whom Lois gathered round her in the attic.

"Well, you needn't come," said Lois; "I don't want you." Then, of course, Margery cried.

There was one occasion when Mr. Nix, the manager of the flat, very politely, and with the urbanity for which he was famous, warned her that there must not be so much noise at her evening parties. Lois was indignant. "I'll pack up and go. You'd think Nix was Queen Victoria." Nevertheless she did not pack up and go. She knew when she was comfortable. But deep down in her heart something warned her. Did she like all the men who now surrounded her? Was there not something in what Margery said? In France there had been work, heaps of it. Her organising gifts, which were very real, had full play there. The sense of the position that she had had unsettled her. She wanted to fill her life, to be still of importance, to be admired and sought after and talked of. Yet the men with whom she spent her time were not quite the right men, and sometimes that little voice of warning told her that they went too far, said things to her that they had no right to say, told stories. . . .

But did she not encourage them? Was not that what she wanted? Perfect equality now; no false prudery: the new world in which men and women stood shoulder to shoulder with no false reserves, no silly modesties. If Margery didn't like it, she could go. . . .

But she did not want Margery to go.

Then "Tubby" Grenfell came and the world was changed. Grenfell was nicknamed "Tubby" by his friends because he was round and plump and rosy-faced. Lois did not know it, but she liked him at once because of his resemblance to Margery. He was only a boy, twenty-one years of age, and the apple of his mother's eye. He had done magnificently in France, and now he had gone on to the Stock Exchange, where his uncle was a man of importance and power. He had the same rather helpless appealing innocence that Margery had had.



He took life very seriously, but enjoyed it too, laughing a great deal and wanting to see and do everything. His *naïveté* touched Lois. She told him that she was going to be his elder brother. From the very first he had thought Lois perfectly wonderful, just as Margery had done. He received her dicta about life with the utmost gravity. He came and went just as she told him. He "ate out of her hand," his friends told him.

"Well, I'm proud to," he said.

Unfortunately he and Margery disliked one another from the very beginning. That made difficulties for Lois, and she did not like difficulties.

"What you can see in him," said Margery, "I can't think. He's just the sort of man you despise. Of course he's been brave; but anyone can be brave. The other men laugh at him."

He had a good-natured contempt for Margery.

"It's jolly good of you to look after a girl like that," he said to Lois. "It's just your kindness. I don't know how you can bother."

Lois laughed at both of them, and arranged that they should meet as seldom as possible.

Hortons was soon haunted by "Tubby" Grenfell's presence.

"Peace Day" came and went, and Lois really felt that it was time that she "settled her life." Here was the summer before her; there were a number of places to which she might go and she could not make up her mind.

Firstly, she knew that some of the time must be spent with her mother in Wiltshire, and she was dreading this. Her mother never criticised her, never asked her questions, never made any demands, and Lois had rather enjoyed spending days of her "leave" in that silly old-fashioned company. But now? Could it be that Lois was two quite different people and that one half of her was jealous of the other half?

Moreover, there was now a complication about Scotland. "Tubby" had begged her to go to a certain house in Northumberland; nice people; people she knew enough to want to know them more. He begged her to go there during the very month that she had planned to go away with Margery. She knew quite well that if she tried to break the Scottish holiday that would be the end — Margery would leave her and never return. Well, was not that exactly what she had been desiring? Was she not feeling this animosity between "Tubby" and Margery a great nuisance? And yet — and yet — She could not make up her mind to lose Margery; no, not yet. Her hatred of this individual (she had never been undecided in France; she had always known exactly what she intended to do) flung her, precipitately, into that final quarrel with Margery that, in reality, she wanted to avoid. It took place one morning in "the attic." It was a short and stormy scene. Lois began by suggesting that they should take their holiday during part of September instead of August, and that perhaps they would not go so far as Scotland. . . . What about the South Coast? Margery listened, the colour coming into her cheeks, her eyes filling with tears as they always did when she was excited.

"But we'd arranged —" she said in a kind of awe-struck whisper. "Months ago — we fixed —"

"I know, my dear," said Lois, with a carelessness that she by no means felt. "But what does it matter? September's as good as August, and I hate Scotland."

"You said you loved it before," said Margery slowly, staring as though she were a stranger who had brought dramatic news. "I believe," she went on, "it's because you want to stay with Mr. Grenfell."

"If you want to know," cried Lois, suddenly urged on partly by her irritation at being judged, but still more by her anger at

herself for feeling Margery's distress. "It is. You're impossible, Margery. You're so selfish. It can't make any difference to you, putting our holiday off. You're selfish. That's what it is."

Then a remarkable thing occurred. Margery did not burst into tears. Only all the colour drained from her face and her eyes fell.

"No, I don't think I'm selfish," said Margery. "I want you to enjoy yourself. You're tired of me, and I don't blame you. But I won't hang on to you. That would be selfish if I did. I think I'll go now. Besides," she added, "I think you're in love with Mr. Grenfell."

Suddenly, as Margery said the words, Lois knew that it was true. She was in love, and for the first time in her life. A great exultation and happiness filled her; for the first time in many months she was simple and natural and good. Her masculinity fell from her, leaving her her true self.

She came over to Margery, knelt down by her side, put her arms around her and kissed her. Margery returned the kiss, but did not surrender herself. Her body was stiff and unyielding. She withdrew herself from Lois and got up.

"I'm glad," she said, her voice trembling a little. "I hope you'll be very happy."

Lois looked at her with anxious eyes.

"But this doesn't make any difference to us," she said. "We can be the same friends as before — more than we were. You'll like 'Tubby,' Margery darling, when you know him. We'll have a great time — we three."

"No," said Margery. "Since we came back from France, you've been changing all the time. It seemed right out there, your ordering everybody about. I admired it. You were fine. But now in London — I've no right to say so. But you're try-

ing to do all the things men do; and it's — it's — heavenly, somehow. It doesn't suit you. It isn't natural. I don't believe the men like it either, or at any rate not the nice men. I suppose it's silly, but I don't admire you any more, and if I don't admire you, I can't love you." With that last word she was gone, and Lois knew quite well that she would never come back again.

Lois stayed in the "attic" that morning in an odd confusion of mind. Margery was jealous, of course; that was what had made her say those things. Her discovery of her love for Grenfell filled her with joy, so that she could scarcely realize Margery; moreover the uncertainty that had been troubling her for months was over, but behind these feelings was a curious new sense of loss, a sense that she refused to face. Life without Margery — what would it be? But she turned from that and, with joyful anticipation, thought of her new career.

She decided at once to dismiss Margery from her thoughts — not only partially, but altogether, so that no fragment of her should be left. That was her only way to be comfortable. She had on earlier occasions been forced to dismiss people thus absolutely; she had not found it difficult, and she had enjoyed in the doing of it a certain sense that she was finishing them, and that they would be sorry now for what they had done. But with Margery she saw that that would be difficult. Margery had been with her so long, had given her so much praise and encouragement, was associated in so many ways with so many places. She would return again and again, an obstinate ghost, slipping into scenes and thoughts where she should not be. Lois discovered herself watching the post, listening to the telephone, her heart beating at the sudden opening and shutting of a door . . . but Margery did not return.

She centred herself then absolutely around young Grenfell.

She demanded of him twice what she had demanded before because Margery was gone. There was something feverish now in her possession of him. She was not contented and easy as she had been, but must have him absolutely. She was anxious that he should propose to her soon and end this period of doubt and discomfort. She knew, of course, that he would propose — it was merely a question of time — but there was something old-fashioned about him: a sort of *naïveté* which hindered him perhaps from coming forward too quickly.

She was not alone with him very much, because she thought it was good for him to see how other men admired her. She gathered around her more than before the men with whom she might be on thoroughly equal terms, as though in defiance of Margery's final taunt to her. It was as though she said to that perpetually interfering ghost: "Well, if you will come back and remind me, you shall see that you were wrong in what you said. Men do like me for the very things of which you disapproved . . . and they shall like me more and more."

She thought Grenfell understood that it was because of him that Margery had gone.

"She was jealous of you," she said, laughing. "I'm sure I don't know why she should have been. . . . You never liked one another, did you? Poor Margery! She's old-fashioned. She ought to have lived fifty years ago."

She was surprised when he said, "Did she dislike me? Of course we used to fight, but I didn't think it meant anything; I didn't dislike her. I'm so sorry you've quarrelled."

He seemed really concerned about it. One day he amazed her by saying that he'd seen Margery. They had met somewhere and had a talk. Lois's heart leapt.

"I'm ready to forgive her," she said, "for what she did. But of course things can never be quite the same again."



"Oh, she won't come back!" Grenfell said. "I begged her, but she said, 'No.' You weren't as you used to be."

At this Lois felt an unhappiness that surprised her by its vehemence. Then she put that away and was angry. "I don't want her back," she cried. "If she came and begged me I wouldn't have her."

But she felt that Grenfell had not reported truly. He was jealous of Margery, and did not want her to return. He seemed now at times to be a little restive under her domination; that only made her more dominating. She had scenes with him, all of them worked up by her. She arranged them because he was so sweet to her when they were reconciled. He was truly in despair if she were unhappy, and would do anything to make her comfortable again. Once they were engaged, she told herself, she would have no more scenes. She would be sure of him then. She was in a strange state of excitement and uncertainty; but then, these were uncertain and exciting times. No one seemed to know quite where they were, with strikes and dances and all the "classes" upside down. Although Lois believed that women should be just as men she resented it when Fanny, the portress, was rude to her. She had got into the way of giving Fanny little things to do; sending her messages, asking her to stamp letters, to wrap up parcels. Fanny was so willing that she would do anything for anybody; but the day came when Fanny frankly told her that she had not the time to carry messages. Her place was in the hall. She was very sorry. . . . Lois was indignant. What was the girl there for? She appealed to Grenfell. But he, in the charming, hesitating, courteous way that he had, was inclined to agree with Fanny. After all, the girl had her work to do. She had to be in her place. At this little sign of rebellion Lois redoubled her efforts.

He must propose to her soon. She wished that he was not quite so diffident. She found here that this masculinity of hers hindered a little the opportunities of courtship. If you behaved just like a man, swore like a man, drank like a man, discussed any moral question like a man, scenes with sentiment and emotion were difficult. When you told a man a hundred times a day that you wanted him to treat you as he would a pal, it was perhaps irrational of you to expect him to kiss you. Men did not kiss men, nor did they bother to explain if they were rude or casual.

She had, however, a terrible shock one night when Conrad Hawke, a man whom she never liked, seeing her back to the "attic" after the theatre, tried to kiss her. She smacked his face. He was deeply indignant. "Why, you've been asking for it!" he cried. This horrified her, and she decided that Grenfell must propose to her immediately. This was the more necessary, because during the last week or two he had been less often to see her — and had been less at his ease with her. . . . She decided that he wanted to propose but had not the courage.

She planned then that on a certain evening the event should take place. There was to be a great boxing match at Olympia. Beckett was to fight Goddard for the heavyweight championship of Great Britain. She had never seen a boxing match. Grenfell should take her to this one.

When she suggested it he hesitated.

"I'd love us to go together, of course," he said. "All the same, I don't think I approve of women going to boxing matches."

"My dear 'Tubby,'" she cried; "what age do you think you're living in?"

"Well, I don't know," he said, looking at her doubtfully.

"If that isn't too absurd!" she cried. "Has there been a war or has there not? And have I been in France doing every kind of dirty work or not? Really, 'Tubby,' you might be Mother."

His chubby face coloured. His eyes were full of perplexity.

"Oh, of course, if you want to go, I'll take you," he said. "All the same, I'd rather not."

She insisted. The tickets were taken. She was determined that that night he should propose to her.

The great evening had arrived, and they had a little dinner at the Carlton Grill. Lois was wearing a dress of the very latest fashion — that is, a dress that showed all her back, that was cut very low in front, and that left her arms and shoulders quite bare. She seemed, as she sat at the table, to have almost nothing on at all. This, unfortunately, did not suit her. Her figure was magnificent, but the rough life in France had helped neither her skin nor her complexion. The upper part of her chest and her neck were sunburnt. Her arms were brown. She had taken much trouble with her hair, but it would not obey her now as it had done in the old days.

"I'm a fright," she had thought as she looked at herself in the glass. For a moment she thought she would wear one of her old less-revealing evening frocks. But no; she was worrying absurdly. All the women wore these dresses now. She would look a frump in that old dress. In colour the frock was a bright mauve. She was aware that all eyes followed her as she came into the grill room. She carried herself superbly, remembering how many girls — yes, and men too — had called her a queen. She saw at once that "Tubby" Grenfell was uneasy, and not his cheerful, innocent self. He seemed to have something that dragged his thoughts away from her. They both drank a good deal; soon they were laughing uproariously. . . .

They started off in a taxi for Olympia. The wine that she had drunk, the sense of the crisis that this night must bring to her, the beautiful air of this May evening, through which in their open taxi they were gliding, the whisper and the murmur of the Knightsbridge crowd — all these things excited her as she had never in all her life been excited before. Had she looked at herself she would have realised, from this excitement, the child that she really was.

She put her hand on "Tubby's" broad knee and drew a little closer to him. He talked to her eagerly, himself excited by the great event. He explained something of the fighting to her.

"There'll be a lot of 'in-fighting,'" he said; "there always is nowadays, they've caught it from America. You'll find that rather boring. But it isn't boring really. There's heaps of science in it; more than there used to be in the old boxing. They say that that's where Beckett will be beaten — that he can't in-fight. I don't believe they're right, but we'll see. . . . That's what makes to-night so exciting. No one knows really what Beckett can do. He knocked out Wells too quickly, and he's improved so much that he's hardly the same man as he was before."

He chattered on, apparently now quite happy. What a dear he was! What a boy! How natural and good and simple! She felt maternal to him, as though he were her child. How happy they would be when they were married! how happy she would make him!

They drew near to Olympia. They were now in a great stream of cars and taxis. Crowds thronged the road. They got out and pushed their way along. The presence of the crowd thrilled Lois so that her eyes shone and her heart hammered. She clung to "Tubby's" strong arm. Soon they were

through the gates, pushing up the Olympia steps, passing the turnstiles. What strange faces there were on all sides of her! She could not see another woman anywhere. She gathered her cloak more closely about her. They passed into the arena. For a moment she was dazzled by the light. The tiers of seats rose on every side of her, higher and higher. She followed "Tubby" meekly, feeling very small and insignificant. Soon they were seated close to the ring. Already men were boxing, but no one seemed to look at them. Everyone hurried to and fro; people were finding their seats. Around her, above her, beyond her, was a curious electrical hum of excitement, like the buzz of swarming bees. She herself felt so deeply moved that she was not far from tears. She grew more accustomed to the place. She sat back in her chair, throwing her cloak behind her. "Tubby" talked to her in a low voice, explaining where everything was, who various celebrities were. There was Cochran; that was Eugene Corri; there was a famous actor; and so on. She began to be confident. She knew that men were looking at her. She liked them to look at her. She asked "Tubby" for a cigarette. Her eyes moved to the ring; she watched the boxing. She felt a renewed thrill at the sight of the men's splendid condition; and then, as she looked about her and saw the black cloud of men rising above and around her on every side, she could have clapped her hands with joy. Soon she was impatient of the boxing. She wanted the great event of the evening to begin. She felt as though she could not wait any longer, as though she must get up in her seat and call to them to come. She was aware then that "Tubby" was again uncomfortable. Was he distressed because men looked at her? Why should they not? Perhaps he did not think that she should smoke. Well, she *would* smoke. He was not her keeper.



The heat, the smoke, the stir, confused and bewildered her, but she liked the bewilderment. She was drunk with it — only this intense impatience for Beckett and Goddard to come was more than she could bear. “Oh, I *wish* they’d come. . . . I do *wish* they’d come!” she sighed. Then, turning to “Tubby,” she said: “Cheer up! What’s the matter?”

“Oh, I’m all right.” He moved uneasily. She fancied that he glanced with anger at a fat, black-haired, be-ringed man near him who, as she already noticed, stared at her.

“Oh, I *do* wish they’d come!” she cried, speaking more loudly than she had intended. Some man near her heard her and laughed.

They came at last. The tall fellow was Goddard. The shorter man in the dull-coloured dressing-gown was Beckett. They walked about inside the ring; then they sat down and were hidden by a cloud of men with towels. A little man walked about the ring shouting something through a megaphone.

Lois could not hear what he said because of her own excitement. The ring was cleared; the fight had begun. The breathless silence that followed was almost more than she could bear. From the first moment she wanted Beckett to win. His grim seriousness fascinated her. The way that he stood crouching forward, his magnificent condition, the brown healthiness of his skin, appealed to her desperately. “I want him to win! I want him to win!” she repeated again and again to herself. He seemed to be having the best of it. Men shouted his name. The first round was over. In the pause of the interval she realised for a moment, as though she had come down from a great height, that the men near her were looking at her and smiling. She did not care; if only Beckett would win she cared for nothing. “The first round’s Beckett’s on

points, anyway," she heard a man say near her. The ring was cleared again, the men moved cautiously, watching one another. Suddenly Beckett had sprung in. Before she could account to herself for what was happening Goddard was on the floor. Men rose in their seats, shouting. The referee could be seen counting the seconds. Goddard was up. Then Beckett was in to him again — right, left, tuned like a piece of music. Goddard was down again, and this time he lay his full length without moving. The vast building seemed to rise like the personification of one exultant man and shout. Lois herself had risen; she was crying she knew not what, waving her programme. A man had leaped forward and kissed Beckett. Goddard was dragged by his seconds like a sack to his chair. The roar continued; men shouted and yelled and cheered. Lois sat down. It was over; Beckett had won. She had had her desire. She felt as though she had walked for miles and miles through thick, difficult country.

She could only see, over and over again those quick blows — right, left, like a piece of music. . . .

They sat there quietly for a little; then she said, "Let's go. I don't want to see any more after that."

Grenfell agreed.

Outside there was a strange peace and quiet. A large crowd waited, but it was silent. It was watching for Beckett.

The street was deliciously cool, and in the broad space beyond Olympia there was only a rumbling sibilant rustle that threaded the dusky trees. The stars shone in a sky of velvet. They found a taxi.

"I'll see you to your door," "Tubby" said.

During the drive very few words were spoken. Lois was concentrating now all her effort on the scene that was to come. She was quite certain of her victory; she felt strong and sure

with the confidence that the thrill of the fight had just given her. Above all, she loved Grenfell. It was the first time in her life that she had known love, and now that it had come she was wrapped in the wonder of it, stripped of all her artifices and conceits, as simply and naturally caught by it as any ignorant girl of her grandmother's day.

They were in Duke Street; the car stopped before Hortons.

Grenfell got out.

"Good-night," he said. "I'm so awfully glad you enjoyed it."

"No, you've got to come in. You have, really, 'Tubby.' It's very early — not ten yet. I'll make you some coffee."

He looked for a moment as though he would refuse. Then he nodded his head.

"All right," he said; "just for a bit." They went up in the lift superintended by young William, one of the Hortons officials, in age about fourteen, but dressed, with his oiled hair, high collar, and uniform, to be anything over twenty.

"Oh, sir, who won the fight?" he asked in a husky voice when he heard Lois make some allusion to Olympia.

"Beckett," said Grenfell.

"Gawd bless Joe," said young William piously.

The "attic" looked very comfortable and cosy. Grenfell sank into the long sofa. Lois made the coffee. It was as though Beckett's victory had also been hers. She felt as though she could not be defeated. When she saw him sitting there so comfortably she felt as though they were already married.

She knew that he had something on his mind. She had seen, ever since they left Olympia, that there was something that he wanted to say to her. She could not doubt what it was. . . . She stood there smiling at him as he drank his coffee. How

she loved him! Every hair of his round bullet-shaped head, his rosy cheeks, his strength and cleanliness, his shyness and honesty.

"Oh, I've just loved to-night!"

"I'm so glad you have," he answered.

Another long silence followed. He smoked, blowing rings and then breaking them with his finger. At last she spoke, smiling:

" 'Tubby,' you want to say something to me."

"Well — "

"Yes, you do, and I know what it is."

"You know?" He stared at her, confused and shy.

"Yes," she laughed. "Of course I do. I've known for weeks."

"For weeks? But you can't — "

"Oh, you think you can hide things — you can't!" She suddenly came over to him, knelt down by the sofa, putting her hand on his arm.

"You ridiculous baby! You're shy. You're afraid to tell me. But, thank Heaven, all that old-fashioned nonsense is over. I can tell you what you want to say without either of us being ashamed. . . . 'Tubby,' darling . . . I know. I've known for weeks, and it's all right. I'll marry you to-morrow if you want me. I've loved you since first I set eyes on you. Oh, 'Tubby,' we'll be so happy! We — "

But she was stopped by the look in his eyes. He had moved away; his face was crimson; his eyes wide with dismay. She knew at once that she had made a horrible mistake. He didn't love her. She rose; shame, misery, anger, self-contempt, all struggling together in her heart. She would have liked to speak. No words would come.

"Lois!" he said at last. "I'm awfully sorry. I didn't know

you were going to say that, or I'd have stopped you. We're the greatest pals in the world, of course, but — ”

“You don't want to marry me,” Lois interrupted. “Of course. It's quite natural. I've made a bit of a fool of myself, 'Tubby.' You'd better say good-night and go.”

He got up.

“Oh, Lois, I'm so sorry. . . . But I couldn't tell. I've had something else on my mind all these weeks — something that for the last three days I've been trying to tell you. Margery and I are engaged to be married.”

That took the colour from her face. She stepped back, putting one hand on the mantelpiece to steady herself.

“Margery! . . . You! That stupid little idiot!”

There she made a mistake. He took her retort as a dog takes a douse of water, shaking his head resentfully.

“You mustn't say that, Lois. And after all, it was you that brought us together.”

“I!” Her indignation as she turned on him was red-hot.

“Yes. I was sorry for her when you turned her off. I went to see her. We agreed about you from the beginning, and that was a bond.”

“Agreed about me?”

“Yes. We thought it was such a pity that you went about with all these men. She told me how splendid you were in France. She had thought that I was in love with you, but I told her of course that I'd always thought of you as a man almost. Love was a different sort of thing. . . . Although tonight at the boxing you weren't a man, either. Anyway — ”

She cut short his halting, confused explanation with contempt.

“You'd better go. You and Margery have treated me pretty badly between you. Good-night.”



He tried to say something, but the sight of her furious eyes checked him. Without another word he went. The door closed; the room was suddenly intensely silent, as though it were waiting to hear the echo of his step.

She stood, fury, contempt, working in her face. Suddenly her eyes flooded with tears. Her brow puckered. She flung herself down on the floor beside the sofa, and burying her face in it cried, with complete abandonment, from her breaking heart.

## THE TRUTH ABOUT PYECKRAFT <sup>1</sup>

By H. G. WELLS

HE sits not a dozen yards away. If I glance over my shoulder I can see him. And if I catch his eye — and usually I catch his eye — it meets me with an expression —

It is mainly an imploring look — and yet with suspicion in it.

Confound his suspicion! If I wanted to tell on him I should have told long ago. I don't tell and I don't tell, and he ought to feel at his ease. As if anything so gross and fat as he could feel at ease! Who would believe me if I did tell?

Poor old Pyecraft! Great, uneasy jelly of substance! The fattest clubman in London.

He sits at one of the little club tables in the huge bay by the fire, stuffing. What is he stuffing? I glance judiciously and catch him biting at a round of hot buttered tea-cake, with his eyes on me. Confound him! — with his eyes on me!

That settles it, Pyecraft! Since you *will* be abject, since you *will* behave as though I was not a man of honour, here, right under your embedded eyes, I write the thing down — the plain truth about Pyecraft. The man I helped, the man I shielded, and who has requited me by making my club unendurable, absolutely unendurable, with his liquid appeal, with the perpetual "don't tell" of his looks.

And, besides, why does he keep on eternally eating?

Well, here goes for the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth!

Pyecraft — . I made the acquaintance of Pyecraft in this

<sup>1</sup> From *Twelve Stories and a Dream*, by H. G. Wells. Copyright, 1897, 1903, by H. G. Wells; published by Charles Scribner's Sons. By permission of the publishers.

very smoking-room. I was a young, nervous new member, and he saw it. I was sitting all alone, wishing I knew more of the members, and suddenly he came, a great rolling front of chins and abdomina, towards me, and grunted and sat down in a chair close by me and wheezed for a space with a match and lit a cigar, and then addressed me. I forget what he said — something about the matches not lighting properly, and afterwards as he talked he kept stopping the waiters one by one as they went by, and telling them about the matches in that thin, fluty voice he has. But anyhow, it was in some such way we began our talking.

He talked about various things and came round to games. And thence to my figure and complexion. “*You* ought to be a good cricketer,” he said. I suppose I am slender, slender to what some people would call lean, and I suppose I am rather dark, still — I am not ashamed of having a Hindu great-grand-mother, but, for all that, I don’t want casual strangers to see through me at a glance to *her*. So that I was set against Pyecraft from the beginning.

But he only talked about me in order to get to himself.

“I expect,” he said, “you take no more exercise than I do, and probably you eat no less.” (Like all excessively obese people he fancied he ate nothing.) “Yet” — and he smiled an oblique smile — “we differ.”

And then he began to talk about his fatness and his fatness; all he did for his fatness and all he was going to do for his fatness; what people had advised him to do for his fatness and what he had heard of people doing for fatness similar to his. “*A priori*,” he said, “one would think a question of nutrition could be answered by dietary and a question of assimilation by drugs.” It was stifling. It was dumpling talk. It made me feel swelled to hear him.

One stands that sort of thing once in a way at a club, but a time came when I fancied I was standing too much. He took to me altogether too conspicuously. I could never go into the smoking-room but he would come wallowing towards me, and sometimes he came and gormandised round and about me while I had my lunch. He seemed at times almost to be clinging to me. He was a bore, but not so fearful a bore as to be limited to me; and from the first there was something in his manner — almost as though he knew, almost as though he penetrated to the fact that I *might* — that there was a remote, exceptional chance that no one else presented.

"I'd give anything to get it down," he would say — "anything," and peer at me over his vast cheeks and pant.

Poor old Pyecraft! He has just gonged, no doubt to order another buttered tea-cake!

He came to the actual thing one day. "Our Pharmacopœia," he said, "our Western Pharmacopœia is anything but the last word of medical science. In the East, I've been told —"

He stopped and stared at me. It was like being at an aquarium.

I was quite suddenly angry with him. "Look here," I said, "who told you about my great-grandmother's recipes?"

"Well," he fenced.

"Every time we've met for a week," I said — "and we've met pretty often — you've given me a broad hint or so about that little secret of mine."

"Well," he said, "now the cat's out of the bag, I'll admit, yes, it is so. I had it —"

"From Pattison?"

"Indirectly," he said, which I believe was iying, "yes."

"Pattison," I said, "took that stuff at his own risk."

He pursed his mouth and bowed.

"My great-grandmother's recipes," I said, "are queer things to handle. My father was near making me promise —"

"He didn't?"

"No. But he warned me. He himself used one — once."

"Ah! . . . But do you think — ? Suppose — suppose there did happen to be one —"

"The things are curious documents," I said. "Even the smell of 'em. . . . No!"

But after going so far Pyecraft was resolved I should go farther. I was always a little afraid if I tried his patience too much he would fall on me suddenly and smother me. I own I was weak. But I was also annoyed with Pyecraft. I had got to that state of feeling for him that disposed me to say, "Well, *take* the risk!" The little affair of Pattison to which I have alluded was a different matter altogether. What it was doesn't concern us now, but I knew, anyhow, that the particular recipe I used then was safe. The rest I didn't know so much about, and, on the whole, I was inclined to doubt their safety pretty completely.

Yet even if Pyecraft got poisoned —

I must confess the poisoning of Pyecraft struck me as an immense undertaking.

That evening I took that queer, odd-scented sandal-wood box out of my safe and turned the rustling skins over. The gentleman who wrote the recipes for my great-grandmother evidently had a weakness for skins of a miscellaneous origin; and his handwriting was cramped to the last degree. Some of the things are quite unreadable to me — though my family, with its Indian Civil Service associations, has kept up a knowledge of Hindustani from generation to generation — and none are absolutely plain sailing. But I found the one that I knew



was there soon enough, and sat on the floor by my safe for some time looking at it.

"Look here," said I to Pyecraft next day, and snatched the slip away from his eager grasp.

"So far as I can make it out, this is a recipe for Loss of Weight. ("Ah!" said Pyecraft.) I'm not absolutely sure, but I think it's that. And if you take my advice you'll leave it alone. Because, you know — I blacken my blood in your interest, Pyecraft — my ancestors on that side were, so far as I can gather, a jolly queer lot. See?"

"Let me try it," said Pyecraft.

I leant back in my chair. My imagination made one mighty effort and fell flat within me. "What in Heaven's name, Pyecraft," I asked, "do you think you'll look like when you get thin?"

He was impervious to reason. I made him promise never to say a word to me about his disgusting fatness again whatever happened — never, and then I handed him that little piece of skin.

"It's nasty stuff," I said.

"No matter," he said, and took it.

He goggled at it. "But — but — " he said.

He had just discovered that it wasn't English.

"To the best of my ability," I said, "I will do you a translation."

I did my best. After that we didn't speak for a fortnight. Whenever he approached me I frowned and motioned him away, and he respected our compact, but at the end of a fortnight he was as fat as ever. And then he got a word in.

"I must speak," he said. "It isn't fair. There's something wrong. It's done me no good. You're not doing your great-grandmother justice."

"Where's the recipe?"

He produced it gingerly from his pocket-book.

I ran my eye over the items. "Was the egg addled?" I asked.

"No. Ought it to have been?"

"That," I said, "goes without saying in all my poor dear great-grandmother's recipes. When condition or quality is not specified you must get the worst. She was drastic or nothing. . . . And there's one or two possible alternatives to some of these other things. You got *fresh* rattlesnake venom?"

"I got a rattlesnake from Jamrach's. It cost — it cost — "

"That's your affair, anyhow. This last item — "

"I know a man who — "

"Yes. H'm. Well, I'll write the alternatives down. So far as I know the language, the spelling of this recipe is particularly atrocious. By-the-bye, dog here probably means pariah dog."

For a month after that I saw Pyecraft constantly at the club and as fat and anxious as ever. He kept our treaty, but at times he broke the spirit of it by shaking his head despondently. Then one day in the cloakroom he said, "Your great-grandmother — "

"Not a word against her," I said; and he held his peace.

I could have fancied he had desisted, and I saw him one day talking to three new members about his fatness as though he was in search of other recipes. And then, quite unexpectedly, his telegram came.

"Mr. Formalyn!" bawled a page-boy under my nose, and I took the telegram and opened it at once.

"*For Heaven's sake come. — Pyecraft.*"

"H'm," said I, and to tell the truth I was so pleased at the rehabilitation of my great-grandmother's reputation this evidently promised that I made a most excellent lunch.

I got Pyecraft's address from the hall porter. Pyecraft inhabited the upper half of a house in Bloomsbury, and I went there so soon as I had done my coffee and Trappistine. I did not wait to finish my cigar.

"Mr. Pyecraft?" said I, at the front door.

They believed he was ill; he hadn't been out for two days.

"He expects me," said I, and they sent me up.

I rang the bell at the lattice-door upon the landing.

"He shouldn't have tried it, anyhow," I said to myself. "A man who eats like a pig ought to look like a pig."

An obviously worthy woman, with an anxious face and a carelessly placed cap, came and surveyed me through the lattice.

I gave my name and she let me in in a dubious fashion.

"Well?" said I, as we stood together inside Pyecraft's piece of the landing.

"'E said you was to come in if you came," she said, and regarded me, making no motion to show me anywhere. And then, confidentially, "'E's locked in, sir."

"Locked in?"

"Locked himself in yesterday morning and 'asn't let any one in since, sir. And ever and again *swearing*. Oh, my!"

I stared at the door she indicated by her glances. "In there?" I said.

"Yes, sir."

"What's up?"

She shook her head sadly, "'E keeps on calling for vittles, sir. 'Eavy vittles 'e wants. I get 'im what I can. Pork 'e's 'ad, sooit puddin', sossiges, noo bread. Everythink like that. Left outside, if you please, and me go away. 'E's eatin', sir, somethink *awful*."

There came a piping bawl from inside the door: "That Formalyn?"

"That you, Pyecraft?" I shouted, and went and banged the door.

"Tell her to go away."

I did.

Then I could hear a curious pattering upon the door, almost like some one feeling for the handle in the dark, and Pyecraft's familiar grunts.

"It's all right," I said, "she's gone."

But for a long time the door didn't open.

I heard the key turn. Then Pyecraft's voice said, "Come in."

I turned the handle and opened the door. Naturally I expected to see Pyecraft.

Well, you know, he wasn't there!

I never had such a shock in my life. There was his sitting-room in a state of untidy disorder, plates and dishes among the books and writing things, and several chairs overturned, but Pyecraft —

"It's all right, o' man; shut the door," he said, and then I discovered him.

There he was right up close to the cornice in the corner by the door, as though some one had glued him to the ceiling. His face was anxious and angry. He panted and gesticulated. "Shut the door," he said. "If that woman gets hold of it — "

I shut the door, and went and stood away from him and stared.

"If anything gives way and you tumble down," I said, "you'll break your neck, Pyecraft."

"I wish I could," he wheezed.

"A man of your age and weight getting up to kiddish gymnastics — "

"Don't," he said, and looked agonised.

"I'll tell you," he said, and gesticulated.

"How the deuce," said I, "are you holding on up there?"

And then abruptly I realised that he was not holding on at all, that he was floating up there — just as a gas-filled bladder might have floated in the same position. He began a struggle to thrust himself away from the ceiling and to clamber down the wall to me. "It's that prescription," he panted, as he did so. "Your great-gran —"

He took hold of a framed engraving rather carelessly as he spoke and it gave way, and he flew back to the ceiling again, while the picture smashed onto the sofa. Bump he went against the ceiling, and I knew then why he was all over white on the more salient curves and angles of his person. He tried again more carefully, coming down by way of the mantel.

It was really a most extraordinary spectacle, that great, fat, apoplectic-looking man upside down and trying to get from the ceiling to the floor. "That prescription," he said. "Too successful."

"How?"

"Loss of weight — almost complete."

And then, of course, I understood.

"By Jove, Pyecraft," said I, "what you wanted was a cure for fatness! But you always called it weight. You would call it weight."

Somehow I was extremely delighted. I quite liked Pyecraft for the time. "Let me help you!" I said, and took his hand and pulled him down. He kicked about, trying to get foothold somewhere. It was very like holding a flag on a windy day.

"That table," he said, pointing, "is solid mahogany and very heavy. If you can put me under that —"

I did, and there he wallowed about like a captive balloon, while I stood on his hearthrug and talked to him.



I lit a cigar. "Tell me," I said, "what happened?"

"I took it," he said.

"How did it taste?"

"Oh, *beastly!*"

I should fancy they all did. Whether one regards the ingredients or the probable compound or the possible results, almost all my great-grandmother's remedies appear to me at least to be extraordinarily uninviting. For my own part —

"I took a little sip first."

"Yes?"

"And as I felt lighter and better after an hour, I decided to take the draught."

"My dear Pyecraft!"

"I held my nose," he explained. "And then I kept on getting lighter and lighter — and helpless, you know."

He gave way suddenly to a burst of passion. "What the goodness am I to *do?*" he said.

"There's one thing pretty evident," I said, "that you mustn't do. If you go out of doors you'll go up and up." I waved an arm upward. "They'd have to send Santos-Dumont after you to bring you down again."

"I suppose it will wear off?"

I shook my head. "I don't think you can count on that," I said.

And then there was another burst of passion, and he kicked out at adjacent chairs and banged the floor. He behaved just as I should have expected a great, fat, self-indulgent man to behave under trying circumstances — that is to say, very badly. He spoke of me and of my great-grandmother with an utter want of discretion.

"I never asked you to take the stuff," I said.

And generously disregarding the insults he was putting upon

me, I sat down in his armchair and began to talk to him in a sober, friendly fashion.

I pointed out to him that this was a trouble he had brought upon himself, and that it had almost an air of poetical justice. He had eaten too much. This he disputed, and for a time we argued the point.

He became noisy and violent, so I desisted from this aspect of his lesson. "And then," said I, "you committed the sin of euphuism. You called it, not Fat, which is just and inglorious, but Weight. You —"

He interrupted to say that he recognised all that. What was he to *do*?

I suggested he should adapt himself to his new conditions. So we came to the really sensible part of the business. I suggested that it would not be difficult for him to learn to walk about on the ceiling with his hands —

"I can't sleep," he said.

But that was no great difficulty. It was quite possible, I pointed out, to make a shake-up under a wire mattress, fasten the under things on with tapes, and have a blanket, sheet, and coverlet to button at the side. He would have to confide in his housekeeper, I said; and after some squabbling he agreed to that. (Afterwards it was quite delightful to see the beautifully matter-of-fact way with which the good lady took all these amazing inversions.) He could have a library ladder in his room, and all his meals could be laid on the top of his bookcase. We also hit on an ingenious device by which he could get to the floor whenever he wanted, which was simply to put the *British Encyclopædia* (tenth edition) on the top of his open shelves. He just pulled out a couple of volumes and held on, and down he came. And we agreed there must be iron staples along the skirting, so that he could cling to those whenever he wanted to get about the room on the lower level.

As we got on with the thing I found myself almost keenly interested. It was I who called in the housekeeper and broke matters to her, and it was I chiefly who fixed up the inverted bed. In fact, I spent two whole days at his flat. I am a handy, interfering sort of man with a screw-driver, and I made all sorts of ingenious adaptations for him — ran a wire to bring his bells within reach, turned all his electric lights up instead of down, and so on. The whole affair was extremely curious and interesting to me, and it was delightful to think of Pyecraft like some great, fat blow-fly, crawling about on his ceiling and clambering round the lintels of his doors from one room to another, and never, never, never coming to the club any more. . . .

Then, you know, my fatal ingenuity got the better of me. I was sitting by his fire drinking his whisky, and he was up in his favourite corner by the cornice, tacking a Turkey carpet to the ceiling, when the idea struck me. “By Jove, Pyecraft!” I said, “all this is totally unnecessary.”

And before I could calculate the complete consequences of my notion I blurted it out. “Lead underclothing,” said I, and the mischief was done.

Pyecraft received the thing almost in tears. “To be right ways up again —” he said.

I gave him the whole secret before I saw where it would take me. “Buy sheet lead,” I said, “stamp it into discs. Sew ’em all over your underclothes until you have enough. Have lead-soled boots, carry a bag of solid lead, and the thing is done! Instead of being a prisoner here you may go abroad again, Pyecraft; you may travel —”

A still happier idea came to me. “You need never fear a shipwreck. All you need do is just slip off some or all of your clothes, take the necessary amount of luggage in your hand, and float up in the air —”

In his emotion he dropped the tack-hammer within an ace of my head. "By Jove!" he said, "I shall be able to come back to the club again."

The thing pulled me up short. "By Jove!" I said faintly. "Yes. Of course — you will."

He did. He does. There he sits behind me now, stuffing — as I live — a third go of buttered tea-cake. And no one in the whole world knows — except his housekeeper and me — that he weighs practically nothing; that he is a mere boring mass of assimilatory matter, mere clouds in clothing, *niente, nefas*, the most inconsiderable of men. There he sits watching until I have done this writing. Then, if he can, he will waylay me. He will come billowing up to me. . . .

He will tell me over again all about it, how it feels, how it doesn't feel, how he sometimes hopes it is passing off a little. And always somewhere in that fat, abundant discourse he will say, "The secret's keeping, eh? If any one knew of it — I should be so ashamed. . . . Makes a fellow look such a fool, you know. Crawling about on a ceiling and all that. . . ."

And now to elude Pyecraft, occupying, as he does, an admirable strategic position between me and the door.

## XINGU<sup>1</sup>

By EDITH WHARTON

### I

MRS. BALLINGER is one of the ladies who pursue Culture in bands, as though it were dangerous to meet alone. To this end she had founded the Lunch Club, an association composed of herself and several other indomitable huntresses of erudition. The Lunch Club, after three or four winters of lunching and debate, had acquired such local distinction that the entertainment of distinguished strangers became one of its accepted functions; in recognition of which it duly extended to the celebrated "Osric Dane," on the day of her arrival in Hillbridge, an invitation to be present at the next meeting.

The club was to meet at Mrs. Ballinger's. The other members, behind her back, were of one voice in deploring her unwillingness to cede her rights in favour of Mrs. Plinth, whose house made a more impressive setting for the entertainment of celebrities; while, as Mrs. Leveret observed, there was always the picture-gallery to fall back on.

Mrs. Plinth made no secret of sharing this view. She had always regarded it as one of her obligations to entertain the Lunch Club's distinguished guests. Mrs. Plinth was almost as proud of her obligations as she was of her picture-gallery; she was in fact fond of implying that the one possession implied the other, and that only a woman of her wealth could afford to live up to a standard as high as that which she had set herself.

<sup>1</sup> From *Xingu and Other Stories*, by Edith Wharton. Copyright, 1916, by Charles Scribner's Sons. By permission of the publishers.



An all-round sense of duty, roughly adaptable to various ends, was, in her opinion, all that Providence exacted of the more humbly stationed; but the power which had predestined Mrs. Plinth to keep a footman clearly intended her to maintain an equally specialized staff of responsibilities. It was the more to be regretted that Mrs. Ballinger, whose obligations to society were bounded by the narrow scope of two parlour-maids, should have been so tenacious of the right to entertain Osric Dane.

The question of that lady's reception had for a month past profoundly moved the members of the Lunch Club. It was not that they felt themselves unequal to the task, but that their sense of the opportunity plunged them into the agreeable uncertainty of the lady who weighs the alternatives of a well-stocked wardrobe. If such subsidiary members as Mrs. Leveret were fluttered by the thought of exchanging ideas with the author of *The Wings of Death*, no forebodings disturbed the conscious adequacy of Mrs. Plinth, Mrs. Ballinger and Miss Van Vluyck. *The Wings of Death* had, in fact, at Miss Van Vluyck's suggestion, been chosen as the subject of discussion at the last club meeting, and each member had thus been enabled to express her own opinion or to appropriate whatever sounded well in the comments of the others.

Mrs. Roby alone had abstained from profiting by the opportunity; but it was now openly recognised that, as a member of the Lunch Club, Mrs. Roby was a failure. "It all comes," as Miss Van Vluyck put it, "of accepting a woman on a man's estimation." Mrs. Roby, returning to Hillbridge from a prolonged sojourn in exotic lands — the other ladies no longer took the trouble to remember where — had been heralded by the distinguished biologist, Professor Foreland, as the most agreeable woman he had ever met; and the members of the

Lunch Club, impressed by an encomium that carried the weight of a diploma, and rashly assuming that the Professor's social sympathies would follow the line of his professional bent, had seized the chance of annexing a biological member. Their disillusionment was complete. At Miss Van Vluyck's first off-hand mention of the pterodactyl Mrs. Roby had confusedly murmured: "I know so little about metres —" and after that painful betrayal of incompetence she had prudently withdrawn from farther participation in the mental gymnastics of the club.

"I suppose she flattered him," Miss Van Vluyck summed up — "or else it's the way she does her hair."

The dimensions of Miss Van Vluyck's dining-room having restricted the membership of the club to six, the non-conductiveness of one member was a serious obstacle to the exchange of ideas, and some wonder had already been expressed that Mrs. Roby should care to live, as it were, on the intellectual bounty of the others. This feeling was increased by the discovery that she had not yet read *The Wings of Death*. She owned to having heard the name of Osric Dane; but that — incredible as it appeared — was the extent of her acquaintance with the celebrated novelist. The ladies could not conceal their surprise; but Mrs. Ballinger, whose pride in the club made her wish to put even Mrs. Roby in the best possible light, gently insinuated that, though she had not had time to acquaint herself with *The Wings of Death*, she must at least be familiar with its equally remarkable predecessor, *The Supreme Instant*.

Mrs. Roby wrinkled her sunny brows in a conscientious effort of memory, as a result of which she recalled that, oh, yes, she *had* seen the book at her brother's, when she was staying with him in Brazil, and had even carried it off to read one day

on a boating party; but they had all got to shying things at each other in the boat, and the book had gone overboard, so she had never had the chance —

The picture evoked by this anecdote did not increase Mrs. Roby's credit with the club, and there was a painful pause, which was broken by Mrs. Plinth's remarking: "I can understand that, with all your other pursuits, you should not find much time for reading; but I should have thought you might at least have *got up The Wings of Death* before Osric Dane's arrival."

Mrs. Roby took this rebuke good-humouredly. She had meant, she owned, to glance through the book; but she had been so absorbed in a novel of Trollope's that —

"No one reads Trollope now," Mrs. Ballinger interrupted.

Mrs. Roby looked pained. "I'm only just beginning," she confessed.

"And does he interest you?" Mrs. Plinth enquired.

"He amuses me."

"Amusement," said Mrs. Plinth, "is hardly what I look for in my choice of books."

"Oh, certainly, *The Wings of Death* is not amusing," ventured Mrs. Leveret, whose manner of putting forth an opinion was like that of an obliging salesman with a variety of other styles to submit if his first selection does not suit.

"Was it *meant* to be?" enquired Mrs. Plinth, who was fond of asking questions that she permitted no one but herself to answer. "Assuredly not."

"Assuredly not — that is what I was going to say," assented Mrs. Leveret, hastily rolling up her opinion and reaching for another. "It was meant to — to elevate."

Miss Van Vluyck adjusted her spectacles as though they were the black cap of condemnation. "I hardly see," she in-

terposed, "how a book steeped in the bitterest pessimism can be said to elevate, however much it may instruct."

"I meant, of course, to instruct," said Mrs. Leveret, flurried by the unexpected distinction between two terms which she had supposed to be synonymous. Mrs. Leveret's enjoyment of the Lunch Club was frequently marred by such surprises; and not knowing her own value to the other ladies as a mirror for their mental complacency she was sometimes troubled by a doubt of her worthiness to join in their debates. It was only the fact of having a dull sister who thought her clever that saved her from a sense of hopeless inferiority.

"Do they get married in the end?" Mrs. Roby interposed.

"They — who?" the Lunch Club collectively exclaimed.

"Why, the girl and man. It's a novel, isn't it? I always think that's the one thing that matters. If they're parted it spoils my dinner."

Mrs. Plinth and Mrs. Ballinger exchanged scandalised glances, and the latter said: "I should hardly advise you to read *The Wings of Death* in that spirit. For my part, when there are so many books one *has* to read, I wonder how any one can find time for those that are merely amusing."

"The beautiful part of it," Laura Glyde murmured, "is surely just this — that no one can tell *how The Wings of Death* ends. Osric Dane, overcome, by the awful significance of her own meaning, has mercifully veiled it — perhaps even from herself — as Apelles, in representing the sacrifice of Iphigenia, veiled the face of Agamemnon."

"What's that? Is it poetry?" whispered Mrs. Leveret to Mrs. Plinth, who, disdaining a definite reply, said coldly: "You should look it up. I always make it a point to look things up." Her tone added — "though I might easily have it done for me by the footman."

"I was about to say," Miss Van Vluyck resumed, "that it must always be a question whether a book *can* instruct unless it elevates."

"Oh — " murmured Mrs. Leveret, now feeling herself hopelessly astray.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Ballinger, scenting in Miss Van Vluyck's tone a tendency to depreciate the coveted distinction of entertaining Osric Dane; "I don't know that such a question can seriously be raised as to a book which has attracted more attention among thoughtful people than any novel since *Robert Elsmere*."

"Oh, but don't you see," exclaimed Laura Glyde, "that it's just the dark hopelessness of it all — the wonderful tone-scheme of black on black — that makes it such an artistic achievement? It reminded me when I read it of Prince Rupert's *maniere noire* . . . the book is etched, not painted, yet one feels the colour-values so intensely. . . ."

"Who is *he*?" Mrs. Leveret whispered to her neighbour. "Some one she's met abroad?"

"The wonderful part of the book," Mrs. Ballinger conceded, "is that it may be looked at from so many points of view. I hear that as a study of determinism Professor Lupton ranks it with *The Data of Ethics*."

"I'm told that Osric Dane spent ten years in preparatory studies before beginning to write it," said Mrs. Plinth. "She looks up everything — verifies everything. It has always been my principle, as you know. Nothing would induce me, now, to put aside a book before I'd finished it, just because I can buy as many more as I want."

"And what do *you* think of *The Wings of Death*?" Mrs. Roby abruptly asked her.

It was the kind of question that might be termed out of order,



and the ladies glanced at each other as though disclaiming any share in such a breach of discipline. They all knew there was nothing Mrs. Plinth so much disliked as being asked her opinion of a book. Books were written to read; if one read them what more could be expected? To be questioned in detail regarding the contents of a volume seemed to her as great an outrage as being searched for smuggled laces at the Custom House. The club had always respected this idiosyncrasy of Mrs. Plinth's. Such opinions as she had were imposing and substantial: her mind, like her house, was furnished with monumental "pieces" that were not meant to be disarranged; and it was one of the unwritten rules of the Lunch Club that, within her own province, each member's habits of thought should be respected. The meeting therefore closed with an increased sense, on the part of the other ladies, of Mrs. Roby's hopeless unfitness to be one of them.

## II

Mrs. Leveret, on the eventful day, arrived early at Mrs. Ballinger's, her volume of *Appropriate Allusions* in her pocket.

It always flustered Mrs. Leveret to be late at the Lunch Club: she liked to collect her thoughts and gather a hint, as the others assembled, of the turn the conversation was likely to take. To-day, however, she felt herself completely at a loss; and even the familiar contact of *Appropriate Allusions*, which stuck into her as she sat down, failed to give her any reassurance. It was an admirable little volume, compiled to meet all the social emergencies; so that, whether on the occasion of Anniversaries, joyful or melancholy (as the classification ran), of Banquets, social or municipal, or of Baptisms, Church of England or sectarian, its student need never be at a loss for a pertinent reference. Mrs. Leveret, though she had for years devoutly

conned its pages, valued it, however, rather for its moral support than for its practical services; for though in the privacy of her own room she commanded an army of quotations, these invariably deserted her at the critical moment, and the only phrase she retained — *Canst thou draw out leviathan with a hook?* — was one she had never yet found occasion to apply.

To-day she felt that even the complete mastery of the volume would hardly have insured her self-possession; for she thought it probable that, even if she *did*, in some miraculous way, remember an Allusion, it would be only to find that Osric Dane used a different volume (Mrs. Leveret was convinced that literary people always carried them), and would consequently not recognise her quotations.

Mrs. Leveret's sense of being adrift was intensified by the appearance of Mrs. Ballinger's drawing-room. To a careless eye its aspect was unchanged; but those acquainted with Mrs. Ballinger's way of arranging her books would instantly have detected the marks of recent perturbation. Mrs. Ballinger's province, as a member of the Lunch Club, was the Book of the Day. On that, whatever it was, from a novel to a treatise on experimental psychology, she was confidently, authoritatively "up." What became of last year's books, or last week's even; what she did with the "subjects" she had previously professed with equal authority; no one had ever yet discovered. Her mind was an hotel where facts came and went like transient lodgers, without leaving their address behind, and frequently without paying for their board. It was Mrs. Ballinger's boast that she was "abreast with the Thought of the Day," and her pride that this advanced position should be expressed by the books on her table. These volumes, frequently renewed, and almost always damp from the press, bore names generally unfamiliar to Mrs. Leveret, and giving her, as she furtively scanned them,

a disheartening glimpse of new fields of knowledge to be breathlessly traversed in Mrs. Ballinger's wake. But to-day a number of maturer-looking volumes were adroitly mingled with the *primeurs* of the press — Karl Marx jostled Professor Bergson, and the *Confessions of St. Augustine* lay beside the last work on "Mendelism"; so that even to Mrs. Leveret's fluttered perceptions it was clear that Mrs. Ballinger didn't in the least know what Osric Dane was likely to talk about, and had taken measures to be prepared for anything. Mrs. Leveret felt like a passenger on an ocean steamer who is told that there is no immediate danger, but that she had better put on her life-belt.

It was a relief to be roused from these forebodings by Miss Van Vluyck's arrival.

"Well, my dear," the new-comer briskly asked her hostess, "what subjects are we to discuss to-day?"

Mrs. Ballinger was furtively replacing a volume of Wordsworth by a copy of Verlaine. "I hardly know," she said, somewhat nervously. "Perhaps we had better leave that to circumstances."

"Circumstances?" said Miss Van Vluyck drily. "That means, I suppose, that Laura Glyde will take the floor as usual, and we shall be deluged with literature."

Philanthropy and statistics were Miss Van Vluyck's province, and she resented any tendency to divert their guest's attention from these topics.

Mrs. Plinth at this moment appeared.

"Literature?" she protested in a tone of remonstrance. "But this is perfectly unexpected. I understood we were to talk of Osric Dane's novel."

Mrs. Ballinger winced at the discrimination, but let it pass. "We can hardly make that our chief subject — at least not *too* intentionally," she suggested. "Of course we can let our talk

*drift* in that direction; but we ought to have some other topic as an introduction, and that is what I wanted to consult you about. The fact is, we know so little of Osric Dane's tastes and interests that it is difficult to make any special preparation."

"It may be difficult," said Mrs. Plinth with decision, "but it is necessary. I know what that happy-go-lucky principle leads to. As I told one of my nieces the other day, there are certain emergencies for which a lady should always be prepared. It's in shocking taste to wear colours when one pays a visit of condolence, or a last year's dress when there are reports that one's husband is on the wrong side of the market; and so it is with conversation. All I ask is that I should know beforehand what is to be talked about; then I feel sure of being able to say the proper thing."

"I quite agree with you," Mrs. Ballinger assented; "but —"

And at that instant, heralded by the fluttered parlour-maid, Osric Dane appeared upon the threshold.

Mrs. Leveret told her sister afterward that she had known at a glance what was coming. She saw that Osric Dane was not going to meet them half way. That distinguished personage had indeed entered with an air of compulsion not calculated to promote the easy exercise of hospitality. She looked as though she were about to be photographed for a new edition of her books.

The desire to propitiate a divinity is generally in inverse ratio to its responsiveness, and the sense of discouragement produced by Osric Dane's entrance visibly increased the Lunch Club's eagerness to please her. Any lingering idea that she might consider herself under an obligation to her entertainers was at once dispelled by her manner: as Mrs. Leveret said afterward to her sister, she had a way of looking at you that made

you feel as if there was something wrong with your hat. This evidence of greatness produced such an immediate impression on the ladies that a shudder of awe ran through them when Mrs. Roby, as their hostess led the great personage into the dining-room, turned back to whisper to the others: "What a brute she is!"

The hour about the table did not tend to revise this verdict. It was passed by Osric Dane in the silent deglutition of Mrs. Ballinger's menu, and by the members of the club in the emission of tentative platitudes which their guest seemed to swallow as perfunctorily as the successive courses of the luncheon.

Mrs. Ballinger's reluctance to fix a topic had thrown the club into a mental disarray which increased with the return to the drawing-room, where the actual business of discussion was to open. Each lady waited for the other to speak; and there was a general shock of disappointment when their hostess opened the conversation by the painfully commonplace enquiry: "Is this your first visit to Hillbridge?"

Even Mrs. Leveret was conscious that this was a bad beginning; and a vague impulse of deprecation made Miss Glyde interject: "It is a very small place indeed."

Mrs. Plinth bristled. "We have a great many representative people," she said, in the tone of one who speaks for her order.

Osric Dane turned to her. "What do they represent?" she asked.

Mrs. Plinth's constitutional dislike to being questioned was intensified by her sense of unpreparedness; and her reproachful glance passed the question on to Mrs. Ballinger.

"Why," said that lady, glancing in turn at the other members, "as a community I hope it is not too much to say that we stand for culture."



"For art — " Miss Glyde interjected.

"For art and literature," Mrs. Ballinger emended.

"And for sociology, I trust," snapped Miss Van Vluyck.

"We have a standard," said Mrs. Plinth, feeling herself suddenly secure on the vast expanse of a generalisation; and Mrs. Leveret, thinking there must be room for more than one on so broad a statement, took courage to murmur: "Oh, certainly; we have a standard."

"The object of our little club," Mrs. Ballinger continued, "is to concentrate the highest tendencies of Hillbridge — to centralise and focus its intellectual effort."

This was felt to be so happy that the ladies drew an almost audible breath of relief.

"We aspire," the President went on, "to be in touch with whatever is highest in art, literature and ethics."

Osric Dane again turned to her. "What ethics?" she asked.

A tremor of apprehension encircled the room. None of the ladies required any preparation to pronounce on a question of morals; but when they were called ethics it was different. The club, when fresh from the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, the *Reader's Handbook* or Smith's *Classical Dictionary*, could deal confidently with any subject; but when taken unawares it had been known to define agnosticism as a heresy of the Early Church and Professor Froude as a distinguished histologist; and such minor members as Mrs. Leveret still secretly regarded ethics as something vaguely pagan.

Even to Mrs. Ballinger, Osric Dane's question was unsettling, and there was a general sense of gratitude when Laura Glyde leaned forward to say, with her most sympathetic accent: "You must excuse us, Mrs. Dane, for not being able, just at present, to talk of anything but *The Wings of Death*."

"Yes," said Miss Van Vluyck, with a sudden resolve to carry

the war into the enemy's camp. "We are so anxious to know the exact purpose you had in mind in writing your wonderful book. "

"You will find," Mrs. Plinth interposed, "that we are not superficial readers."

"We are eager to hear from you," Miss Van Vluyck continued, "if the pessimistic tendency of the book is an expression of your own convictions or — "

"Or merely," Miss Glyde thrust in, "a sombre background brushed in to throw your figures into more vivid relief. *Are* you not primarily plastic?"

"*I* have always maintained," Mrs. Ballinger interposed, "that you represent the purely objective method — "

Osric Dane helped herself critically to coffee. "How do you define objective?" she then enquired.

There was a flurried pause before Laura Glyde intensely murmured: "In reading *you* we don't define, we feel."

Osric Dane smiled. "The cerebellum," she remarked, "is not infrequently the seat of the literary emotions." And she took a second lump of sugar.

The sting that this remark was vaguely felt to conceal was almost neutralised by the satisfaction of being addressed in such technical language.

"Ah, the cerebellum," said Miss Van Vluyck complacently. "The club took a course in psychology last winter."

"Which psychology?" asked Osric Dane.

There was an agonising pause, during which each member of the club secretly deplored the distressing inefficiency of the others. Only Mrs. Roby went on placidly sipping her charreuse. At last Mrs. Ballinger said, with an attempt at a high tone: "Well, really, you know, it was last year that we took psychology, and this winter we have been so absorbed in — "

She broke off, nervously trying to recall some of the club's discussions; but her faculties seemed to be paralysed by the petrifying stare of Osric Dane. What *had* the club been absorbed in? Mrs. Ballinger, with a vague purpose of gaining time, repeated slowly: "We've been so intensely absorbed in —"

Mrs. Roby put down her liqueur glass and drew near the group with a smile.

"In Xingu?" she gently prompted.

A thrill ran through the other members. They exchanged confused glances, and then, with one accord, turned a gaze of mingled relief and interrogation on their rescuer. The expression of each denoted a different phase of the same emotion. Mrs. Plinth was the first to compose her features to an air of reassurance: after a moment's hasty adjustment her look almost implied that it was she who had given the word to Mrs. Ballinger.

"Xingu, of course!" exclaimed the latter with her accustomed promptness, while Miss Van Vluyck and Laura Glyde seemed to be plumbing the depths of memory, and Mrs. Leveret, feeling apprehensively for Appropriate Allusions, was somehow reassured by the uncomfortable pressure of its bulk against her person.

Osric Dane's change of countenance was no less striking than that of her entertainers. She too put down her coffee-cup, but with a look of distinct annoyance; she too wore, for a brief moment, what Mrs. Roby afterward described as the look of feeling for something in the back of her head; and before she could dissemble these momentary signs of weakness, Mrs. Roby, turning to her with a deferential smile, had said: "And we've been so hoping that to-day you would tell us just what you think of it."

Osric Dane received the homage of the smile as a matter of course; but the accompanying question obviously embarrassed her, and it became clear to her observers that she was not quick at shifting her facial scenery. It was as though her countenance had so long been set in an expression of unchallenged superiority that the muscles had stiffened, and refused to obey her orders.

"Xingu — " she said, as if seeking in her turn to gain time.

Mrs. Roby continued to press her. "Knowing how engrossing the subject is, you will understand how it happens that the club has let everything else go to the wall for the moment. Since we took up Xingu I might almost say — were it not for your books — that nothing else seems to us worth remembering."

Osric Dane's stern features were darkened rather than lit up by an uneasy smile. "I am glad to hear that you make one exception," she gave out between narrowed lips.

"Oh, of course," Mrs. Roby said prettily; "but as you have shown us that — so very naturally! — you don't care to talk of your own things, we really can't let you off from telling us exactly what you think about Xingu; especially," she added, with a still more persuasive smile, "as some people say that one of your last books was saturated with it."

It was an *it*, then — the assurance sped like fire through the parched minds of the other members. In their eagerness to gain the least little clue to Xingu they almost forgot the joy of assisting at the discomfiture of Mrs. Dane.

The latter reddened nervously under her antagonist's challenge. "May I ask," she faltered out, "to which of my books you refer?"

Mrs. Roby did not falter. "That's just what I want you to tell us; because, though I was present, I didn't actually take part."

"Present at what?" Mrs. Dane took her up; and for an instant the trembling members of the Lunch Club thought that the champion Providence had raised up for them had lost a point. But Mrs. Roby explained herself gaily: "At the discussion, of course. And so we're dreadfully anxious to know just how it was that you went into the Xingu."

There was a portentous pause, a silence so big with incalculable dangers that the members with one accord checked the words on their lips, like soldiers dropping their arms to watch a single combat between their leaders. Then Mrs. Dane gave expression to their inmost dread by saying sharply: "Ah — you say *the* Xingu, do you?"

Mrs. Roby smiled undauntedly. "It *is* a shade pedantic, isn't it? Personally, I always drop the article; but I don't know how the other members feel about it."

The other members looked as though they would willingly have dispensed with this appeal to their opinion, and Mrs. Roby, after a bright glance about the group, went on: "They probably think, as I do, that nothing really matters except the thing itself — except Xingu."

No immediate reply seemed to occur to Mrs. Dane, and Mrs. Ballinger gathered courage to say: "Surely every one must feel that about Xingu."

Mrs. Plinth came to her support with a heavy murmur of assent, and Laura Glyde sighed out emotionally: "I have known cases where it has changed a whole life."

"It has done me worlds of good," Mrs. Leveret interjected, seeming to herself to remember that she had either taken it or read it the winter before.

"Of course," Mrs. Roby admitted, "the difficulty is that one must give up so much time to it. It's very long."

"I can't imagine," said Miss Van Vluyck, "grudging the time given to such a subject."



"And deep in places," Mrs. Roby pursued; (so then it was a book!). "And it isn't easy to skip."

"I never skip," said Mrs. Plinth dogmatically.

"Ah, it's dangerous to, in Xingu. Even at the start there are places where one can't. One must just wade through."

"I should hardly call it *wading*," said Mrs. Ballinger sarcastically.

Mrs. Roby sent her a look of interest. "Ah — you always found it went swimmingly?"

Mrs. Ballinger hesitated. "Of course there are difficult passages," she conceded.

"Yes; some are not at all clear — even," Mrs. Roby added, "if one is familiar with the original."

"As I suppose you are?" Osric Dane interposed, suddenly fixing her with a look of challenge.

Mrs. Roby met it by a deprecating gesture. "Oh, it's really not difficult up to a certain point; though some of the branches are very little known, and it's almost impossible to get at the source."

"Have you ever tried?" Mrs. Plinth enquired, still distrustful of Mrs. Roby's thoroughness.

Mrs. Roby was silent for a moment; then she replied with lowered lids: "No — but a friend of mine did; a very brilliant man; and he told me it was best for women — not to. . . ."

A shudder ran around the room. Mrs. Leveret coughed so that the parlour-maid, who was handing the cigarettes, should not hear; Miss Van Vluyck's face took on a nauseated expression, and Mrs. Plinth looked as if she were passing some one she did not care to bow to. But the most remarkable result of Mrs. Roby's words was the effect they produced on the Lunch Club's distinguished guest. Osric Dane's impassive features suddenly softened to an expression of the warmest human sym-

pathy, and edging her chair toward Mrs. Roby's she asked: "Did he really? And — did you find he was right?"

Mrs. Ballinger, in whom annoyance at Mrs. Roby's unwonted assumption of prominence was beginning to displace gratitude for the aid she had rendered, could not consent to her being allowed, by such dubious means, to monopolise the attention of their guest. If Osric Dane had not enough self-respect to resent Mrs. Roby's flippancy, at least the Lunch Club would do so in the person of its President.

Mrs. Ballinger laid her hand on Mrs. Roby's arm. "We must not forget," she said with a frigid amiability, "that absorbing as Xingu is to *us*, it may be less interesting to — "

"Oh, no, on the contrary, I assure you," Osric Dane intervened.

"— to others," Mrs. Ballinger finished firmly; "and we must not allow our little meeting to end without persuading Mrs. Dane to say a few words to us on a subject which, to-day, is much more present in all our thoughts. I refer, of course, to *The Wings of Death*."

The other members, animated by various degrees of the same sentiment, and encouraged by the humanised mien of their redoubtable guest, repeated after Mrs. Ballinger: "Oh, yes, you really *must* talk to us a little about your book."

Osric Dane's expression became as bored, though not as haughty, as when her work had been previously mentioned. But before she could respond to Mrs. Ballinger's request, Mrs. Roby had risen from her seat, and was pulling down her veil over her frivolous nose.

"I'm so sorry," she said, advancing toward her hostess with outstretched hand, "but before Mrs. Dane begins I think I'd better run away. Unluckily, as you know, I haven't read her books, so I should be at a terrible disadvantage among you all, and besides, I've an engagement to play bridge."

If Mrs. Roby had simply pleaded her ignorance of Osric Dane's works as a reason for withdrawing, the Lunch Club, in view of her recent prowess, might have approved such evidence of discretion; but to couple this excuse with the brazen announcement that she was foregoing the privilege for the purpose of joining a bridge-party was only one more instance of her deplorable lack of discrimination.

The ladies were disposed, however, to feel that her departure — now that she had performed the sole service she was ever likely to render them — would probably make for greater order and dignity in the impending discussion, besides relieving them of the sense of self-distrust which her presence always mysteriously produced. Mrs. Ballinger therefore restricted herself to a formal murmur of regret, and the other members were just grouping themselves comfortably about Osric Dane when the latter, to their dismay, started up from the sofa on which she had been seated.

"Oh wait — do wait, and I'll go with you!" she called out to Mrs. Roby; and, seizing the hands of the disconcerted members, she administered a series of farewell pressures with the mechanical haste of a railway-conductor punching tickets.

"I'm so sorry — I'd quite forgotten — " she flung back at them from the threshold; and as she joined Mrs. Roby, who had turned in surprise at her appeal, the other ladies had the mortification of hearing her say, in a voice which she did not take the pains to lower: "If you'll let me walk a little way with you, I should so like to ask you a few more questions about Xingu . . ."

### III

The incident had been so rapid that the door closed on the departing pair before the other members had time to under-

stand what was happening. Then a sense of the indignity put upon them by Osric Dane's unceremonious desertion began to contend with the confused feeling that they had been cheated out of their due without exactly knowing how or why.

There was a silence, during which Mrs. Ballinger, with a perfunctory hand, rearranged the skilfully grouped literature at which her distinguished guest had not so much as glanced; then Miss Van Vluyck tartly pronounced: "Well, I can't say that I consider Osric Dane's departure a great loss."

This confession crystallised the resentment of the other members, and Mrs. Leveret exclaimed: "I do believe she came on purpose to be nasty!"

It was Mrs. Plinth's private opinion that Osric Dane's attitude toward the Lunch Club might have been very different had it welcomed her in the majestic setting of the Plinth drawing-rooms; but not liking to reflect on the inadequacy of Mrs. Ballinger's establishment she sought a roundabout satisfaction in depreciating her lack of foresight.

"I said from the first that we ought to have had a subject ready. It's what always happens when you're unprepared. Now if we'd only got up Xingu — "

The slowness of Mrs. Plinth's mental processes was always allowed for by the club; but this instance of it was too much for Mrs. Ballinger's equanimity.

"Xingu!" she scoffed. "Why, it was the fact of our knowing so much more about it than she did — unprepared though we were — that made Osric Dane so furious. I should have thought that was plain enough to everybody!"

This retort impressed even Mrs. Plinth, and Laura Glyde, moved by an impulse of generosity, said: "Yes, we really ought to be grateful to Mrs. Roby for introducing the topic. It may have made Osric Dane furious, but at least it made her civil."

"I am glad we were able to show her," added Miss Van Vluyck, "that a broad and up-to-date culture is not confined to the great intellectual centres."

This increased the satisfaction of the other members, and they began to forget their wrath against Osric Dane in the pleasure of having contributed to her discomfiture.

Miss Van Vluyck thoughtfully rubbed her spectacles. "What surprised me most," she continued, "was that Fanny Roby should be so up on Xingu."

This remark threw a slight chill on the company, but Mrs. Ballinger said with an air of indulgent irony: "Mrs. Roby always has the knack of making a little go a long way; still, we certainly owe her a debt for happening to remember that she'd heard of Xingu." And this was felt by the other members to be a graceful way of cancelling once for all the club's obligation to Mrs. Roby.

Even Mrs. Leveret took courage to speed a timid shaft of irony. "I fancy Osric Dane hardly expected to take a lesson in Xingu at Hillbridge!"

Mrs. Ballinger smiled. "When she asked me what we represented — do you remember? — I wish I'd simply said we represented Xingu!"

All the ladies laughed appreciatively at this sally, except Mrs. Plinth, who said, after a moment's deliberation: "I'm not sure it would have been wise to do so."

Mrs. Ballinger, who was already beginning to feel as if she had launched at Osric Dane the retort which had just occurred to her, turned ironically on Mrs. Plinth. "May I ask why?" she enquired.

Mrs. Plinth looked grave. "Surely," she said, "I understood from Mrs. Roby herself that the subject was one it was as well not to go into too deeply?"



Miss Van Vluyck rejoined with precision: "I think that applied only to an investigation of the origin of the — of the —"; and suddenly she found that her usually accurate memory had failed her. "It's a part of the subject I never studied myself," she concluded.

"Nor I," said Mrs. Ballinger.

Laura Glyde bent toward them with widened eyes. "And yet it seems — doesn't it? — the part that is fullest of an esoteric fascination?"

"I don't know on what you base that," said Miss Van Vluyck argumentatively.

"Well, didn't you notice how intensely interested Osric Dane became as soon as she heard what the brilliant foreigner — he *was* a foreigner, wasn't he? — had told Mrs. Roby about the origin — the origin of the rite — or whatever you call it?"

Mrs. Plinth looked disapproving, and Mrs. Ballinger visibly wavered. Then she said: "It may not be desirable to touch on the — on that part of the subject in general conversation; but, from the importance it evidently has to a woman of Osric Dane's distinction, I feel as if we ought not to be afraid to discuss it among ourselves — without gloves — though with closed doors, if necessary."

"I'm quite of your opinion," Miss Van Vluyck came briskly to her support; "on condition, that is, that all grossness of language is avoided."

"Oh, I'm sure we shall understand without that," Mrs. Leveret tittered; and Laura Glyde added significantly: "I fancy we can read between the lines," while Mrs. Ballinger rose to assure herself that the doors were really closed.

Mrs. Plinth had not yet given her adhesion. "I hardly see," she began, "what benefit is to be derived from investigating such peculiar customs —"

But Mrs. Ballinger's patience had reached the extreme limit of tension. "This at least," she returned; "that we shall not be placed again in the humiliating position of finding ourselves less up on our own subjects than Fanny Roby!"

Even to Mrs. Plinth this argument was conclusive. She peered furtively about the room and lowered her commanding tones to ask: "Have you got a copy?"

"A — a copy?" stammered Mrs. Ballinger. She was aware that the other members were looking at her expectantly, and that this answer was inadequate, so she supported it by asking another question. "A copy of what?"

Her companions bent their expectant gaze on Mrs. Plinth, who, in turn, appeared less sure of herself than usual. "Why, of — of — the book," she explained.

"What book?" snapped Miss Van Vluyck, almost as sharply as Osric Dane.

Mrs. Ballinger looked at Laura Glyde, whose eyes were interrogatively fixed on Mrs. Leveret. The fact of being deferred to was so new to the latter that it filled her with an insane temerity. "Why, Xingu, of course!" she exclaimed.

A profound silence followed this challenge to the resources of Mrs. Ballinger's library, and the latter, after glancing nervously toward the Books of the Day, returned with dignity: "It's not a thing one cares to leave about."

"I should think *not!*" exclaimed Mrs. Plinth.

"It *is* a book, then?" said Miss Van Vluyck.

This again threw the company into disarray, and Mrs. Ballinger, with an impatient sigh, rejoined: "Why — there *is* a book — naturally. . . ."

"Then why did Miss Glyde call it a religion?"

Laura Glyde started up. "A religion? I never —"

"Yes, you did," Miss Van Vluyck insisted; "you spoke of rites; and Mrs. Plinth said it was a custom."

Miss Glyde was evidently making a desperate effort to recall her statement; but accuracy of detail was not her strongest point. At length she began in a deep murmur: "Surely they used to do something of the kind at the Eleusinian mysteries —"

"Oh —" said Miss Van Vluyck, on the verge of disapproval; and Mrs. Plinth protested: "I understood there was to be no indelicacy!"

Mrs. Ballinger could not control her irritation. "Really, it is too bad that we should not be able to talk the matter over quietly among ourselves. Personally, I think that if one goes into Xingu at all —"

"Oh, so do I!" cried Miss Glyde.

"And I don't see how one can avoid doing so, if one wishes to keep up with the Thought of the Day —"

Mrs. Leveret uttered an exclamation of relief. "There — that's it!" she interposed.

"What's it?" the President took her up.

"Why — it's a — a Thought: I mean a philosophy."

This seemed to bring a certain relief to Mrs. Ballinger and Laura Glyde, but Miss Van Vluyck said: "Excuse me if I tell you that you're all mistaken. Xingu happens to be a language."

"A language!" the Lunch Club cried.

"Certainly. Don't you remember Fanny Roby's saying that there were several branches, and that some were hard to trace? What could that apply to but dialects?"

Mrs. Ballinger could no longer restrain a contemptuous laugh. "Really, if the Lunch Club has reached such a pass that it has to go to Fanny Roby for instruction on a subject like Xingu, it had almost better cease to exist!"

"It's really her fault for not being clearer," Laura Glyde put in.

"Oh, clearness and Fanny Roby!" Mrs. Ballinger shrugged. "I daresay we shall find she was mistaken on almost every point."

"Why not look it up?" said Mrs. Plinth.

As a rule this recurrent suggestion of Mrs. Plinth's was ignored in the heat of discussion, and only resorted to afterward in the privacy of each member's home. But on the present occasion the desire to ascribe their own confusion of thought to the vague and contradictory nature of Mrs. Roby's statements caused the members of the Lunch Club to utter a collective demand for a book of reference.

At this point the production of her treasured volume gave Mrs. Leveret, for a moment, the unusual experience of occupying the centre front; but she was not able to hold it long, for *Appropriate Allusions* contained no mention of Xingu.

"Oh, that's not the kind of thing we want!" exclaimed Miss Van Vluyck. She cast a disparaging glance over Mrs. Ballinger's assortment of literature, and added impatiently: "Haven't you any useful books?"

"Of course I have," replied Mrs. Ballinger indignantly; "I keep them in my husband's dressing-room."

From this region, after some difficulty and delay, the parlour-maid produced the W-Z volume of an *Encyclopædia* and, in deference to the fact that the demand for it had come from Miss Van Vluyck, laid the ponderous tome before her.

There was a moment of painful suspense while Miss Van Vluyck rubbed her spectacles, adjusted them, and turned to Z; and a murmur of surprise when she said: "It isn't here."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Plinth, "it's not fit to be put in a book of reference."

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Ballinger. "Try X."

Miss Van Vluyck turned back through the volume, peering

short-sightedly up and down the pages, till she came to a stop and remained motionless, like a dog on a point.

"Well, have you found it?" Mrs. Ballinger enquired after a considerable delay.

"Yes. I've found it," said Miss Van Vluyck in a queer voice.

Mrs. Plinth hastily interposed: "I beg you won't read it aloud if there's anything offensive."

Miss Van Vluyck, without answering, continued her silent scrutiny.

"Well, what *is* it?" exclaimed Laura Glyde excitedly.

"*Do* tell us!" urged Mrs. Leveret, feeling that she would have something awful to tell her sister.

Miss Van Vluyck pushed the volume aside and turned slowly toward the expectant group.

"It's a river."

"A *river*?"

"Yes: in Brazil. Isn't that where she's been living?"

"Who? Fanny Roby? Oh, but you must be mistaken. You've been reading the wrong thing," Mrs. Ballinger exclaimed, leaning over her to seize the volume.

"It's the only *Xingu* in the Encyclopædia; and she *has* been living in Brazil," Miss Van Vluyck persisted.

"Yes: her brother has a consulship there," Mrs. Leveret interposed.

"But it's too ridiculous! I — we — why we *all* remember studying Xingu last year — or the year before last," Mrs. Ballinger stammered.

"I thought I did when *you* said so," Laura Glyde avowed.

"*I* said so?" cried Mrs. Ballinger.

"Yes. You said it had crowded everything else out of your mind."



"Well *you* said it had changed your whole life!"

"For that matter, Miss Van Vluyck said she had never grudged the time she'd given it."

Mrs. Plinth interposed: "I made it clear that I knew nothing whatever of the original."

Mrs. Ballinger broke off the dispute with a groan. "Oh, what does it all matter if she's been making fools of us? I believe Miss Van Vluyck's right — she was talking of the river all the while!"

"How could she? It's too preposterous," Miss Glyde exclaimed.

"Listen." Miss Van Vluyck had repossessed herself of the Encyclopædia, and restored her spectacles to a nose reddened by excitement. "'The Xingu, one of the principal rivers of Brazil, rises on the plateau of Mato Grosso, and flows in a northerly direction for a length of no less than one thousand one hundred and eighteen miles, entering the Amazon near the mouth of the latter river. The upper course of the Xingu is auriferous and fed by numerous branches. Its source was first discovered in 1884 by the German explorer von den Steinen, after a difficult and dangerous expedition through a region inhabited by tribes still in the Stone Age of culture.'"

The ladies received this communication in a state of stupefied silence from which Mrs. Leveret was the first to rally. "She certainly *did* speak of its having branches."

The word seemed to snap the last thread of their incredulity. "And of its great length," gasped Mrs. Ballinger.

"She said it was awfully deep, and you couldn't skip — you just had to wade through," Miss Glyde added.

The idea worked its way more slowly through Mrs. Plinth's compact resistances. "How could there be anything improper about a river?" she enquired.

"Improper?"

"Why, what she said about the source — that it was corrupt?"

"Not corrupt, but hard to get at," Laura Glyde corrected. "Some one who'd been there had told her so. I daresay it was the explorer himself — doesn't it say the expedition was dangerous?"

"Difficult and dangerous," read Miss Van Vluyck.

Mrs. Ballinger pressed her hands to her throbbing temples. "There's nothing she said that wouldn't apply to a river — to this river!" She swung about excitedly to the other members. "Why, do you remember her telling us that she hadn't read *The Supreme Instant* because she'd taken it on a boating party while she was staying with her brother, and some one had 'shied' it overboard — 'shied' of course was her own expression."

The ladies breathlessly signified that the expression had not escaped them.

"Well — and then didn't she tell Osric Dane that one of her books was simply saturated with Xingu? Of course it was, if one of Mrs. Roby's rowdy friends had thrown it into the river!"

This surprising reconstruction of the scene in which they had just participated left the members of the Lunch Club inarticulate. At length, Mrs. Plinth, after visibly labouring with the problem, said in a heavy tone: "Osric Dane was taken in too."

Mrs. Leveret took courage at this. "Perhaps that's what Mrs. Roby did it for. She said Osric Dane was a brute, and she may have wanted to give her a lesson."

Miss Van Vluyck frowned. "It was hardly worth while to do it at our expense."

"At least," said Miss Glyde with a touch of bitterness, "she succeeded in interesting her, which was more than we did."

"What chance had we?" rejoined Mrs. Ballinger. "Mrs. Roby monopolised her from the first. And *that*, I've no doubt, was her purpose — to give Osric Dane a false impression of her own standing in the club. She would hesitate at nothing to attract attention: we all know how she took in poor Professor Foreland."

"She actually makes him give bridge-teas every Thursday," Mrs. Leveret piped up.

Laura Glyde struck her hands together. "Why, this is Thursday, and it's *there* she's gone, of course; and taken Osric with her!"

"And they're shrieking over us at this moment," said Mrs. Ballinger between her teeth.

This possibility seemed too preposterous to be admitted. "She would hardly dare," said Miss Van Vluyck, "confess the imposture to Osric Dane."

"I'm not so sure: I thought I saw her make a sign as she left. If she hadn't made a sign, why should Osric Dane have rushed out after her?"

"Well, you know, we'd all been telling her how wonderful Xingu was, and she said she wanted to find out more about it," Mrs. Leveret said, with a tardy impulse of justice to the absent.

This reminder, far from mitigating the wrath of the other members, gave it a stronger impetus.

"Yes — and that's exactly what they're both laughing over now," said Laura Glyde ironically.

Mrs. Plinth stood up and gathered her expensive furs about her monumental form. "I have no wish to criticise," she said; "but unless the Lunch Club can protect its members against the recurrence of such — such unbecoming scenes, I for one —"

"Oh, so do I!" agreed Miss Glyde, rising also.

Miss Van Vluyck closed the Encyclopædia and proceeded to button herself into her jacket. "My time is really too valuable —" she began.

"I fancy we are all of one mind," said Mrs. Ballinger, looking searchingly at Mrs. Leveret, who looked at the others.

"I always deprecate anything like a scandal —" Mrs. Plinth continued.

"She has been the cause of one to-day!" exclaimed Miss Glyde.

Mrs. Leveret moaned: "I don't see how she *could!*" and Miss Van Vluyck said, picking up her note-book: "Some women stop at nothing."

"— but if," Mrs. Plinth took up her argument impressively, "anything of the kind had happened in *my* house" (it never would have, her tone implied), "I should have felt that I owed it to myself either to ask for Mrs. Roby's resignation — or to offer mine."

"Oh, Mrs. Plinth —" gasped the Lunch Club.

"Fortunately for me," Mrs. Plinth continued with an awful magnanimity, "the matter was taken out of my hands by our President's decision that the right to entertain distinguished guests was a privilege vested in her office; and I think the other members will agree that, as she was alone in this opinion, she ought to be alone in deciding on the best way of effacing its — its really deplorable consequences."

A deep silence followed this outbreak of Mrs. Plinth's long-stored resentment.

"I don't see why *I* should be expected to ask her to resign —" Mrs. Ballinger at length began; but Laura Glyde turned back to remind her: "You know she made you say that you'd got on swimmingly in Xingu."

An ill-timed giggle escaped from Mrs. Leveret, and Mrs. Ballinger energetically continued "— but you needn't think for a moment that I'm afraid to!"

The door of the drawing-room closed on the retreating backs of the Lunch Club, and the President of that distinguished association, seating herself at her writing-table, and pushing away a copy of *The Wings of Death* to make room for her elbow, drew forth a sheet of the club's note-paper, on which she began to write: "My dear Mrs. Roby — "









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Robinson, Kenneth Allan,  
Contemporary short stories

